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IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI

THE CANDIDATE

THE TOURNAMENT WHERE SECOND PLACE WAS AS IMPORTANT AS THE FIRST

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CHAIRMAN: Shaun Taulbut
DIRECTOR: Stephen Lowe
EDITORS: Milan Dinic and Shaun Taulbut
PHOTO EDITOR: David Llada
PREPRESS SPECIALIST: Milica Mitic
PHOTOGRAPHY: FIDE Official / Stev Bonhage / David Llada, Wikipedia
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ENQUIRIES: editor@britishchessmagazine.co.uk
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THE 2022 CANDIDATES TOURNAMENT
MADRID, 17TH JUNE – 5TH JULY

IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI 2.0

THE TOURNAMENT WHERE SECOND PLACE WAS AS IMPORTANT AS THE FIRST

BY MILAN DINIC IN LONDON AND ALEKSANDAR COLOVIC IN MADRID

PHOTO: FIDE OFFICIAL / STEV BONHAGE / DAVID LLADA

The most important chess tournament in 2022 ended with a firm, convincing victory by Russian Grandmaster Ian Nepomniachtchi. He took the lead early on and kept it up without a shadow of a doubt until the very end. Nepomniachtchi finished on 9.5/14, without losing a single game!

As in Yekaterinburg in 2021, in Madrid Nepomniachtchi won with a round to spare (and this time he didn't lose the final game!). Is this Nepomniachtchi 2.0 ready to become world champion on his second attempt? Is the world ready for a new world champion?

Unlike the previous Candidates which were interrupted by Covid, this event went smoothly and provided great excitement to the chess world. For two weeks, from 17th June to 5th July, eight top Grandmasters played 56 games in the grand Palacio de Santona to determine who will be the challenger for the title of world champion in chess.

In the July issue of BCM we will take a closer look at the grand chess affair in Spain: the key moments, the highs and the lows and we will try and address the big question roaming in the background - who will the winner of the Candidates face in the match for the title of world champion?

THE SECOND COMING OF IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI

Not many people really expected Nepomniachtchi to make a comeback following his devastating loss to Magnus Carlsen in their match in Dubai. But, he did. In great style!

Winning a tournament such as the Candidates is a success like no other, only surpassed by winning the world crown. To win it twice in a row is an achievement which has so far been made a few times in chess history by the likes of Smyslov, Spassky, Korchnoi and Karpov. (Only one of them didn't go on to become world champion.)

Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi played firmly - taking chances whenever they appeared, accepting draws whenever the position said it was reasonable to do so. As mentioned in one of his early interviews, 'it's important not to lose' because, 'as long as you don't lose it's going well'. And, indeed, Nepomniachtchi didn't lose a single game in the 2022 Candidates.

It seems that Nepomniachtchi's recipe for success was the same one he used in Yekaterinburg in 2020/21 and based on experiences he had as a commentator in the earlier Candidates events: 'You should never go crazy and you probably shouldn't lose. You better make a boring draw but you shouldn't lose.'

Ding Liren – Ian Nepomniachtchi

Nepomniachtchi played confidently and convincingly from round one, where he crushed World No. 2 Ding Liren. Black's apathetic loss with White seemed to announce that not all was well with World No. 2.

Ding Liren – Ian **Nepomniachtchi**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (1.2)

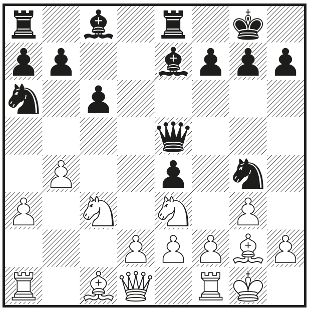
Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic

1.c4 e5 This seemed to surprise Ding Liren even though Nepomniachtchi has played it on more than one occasion. Perhaps he expected QGD setups by Black because those were Nepomniachtchi's preparation for the match in Dubai.

2.g3 c6 The most ambitious try by Black, trying to take advantage of White's lack of central control by expanding in the centre with ...d5.

3.♘f3 e4 4.♘d4 d5 5.cxd5 ♕xd5 6.♘c2 ♘f6 7.♘c3 ♕e5 8.♗g2 ♘a6 9.0-0 ♗e7 10.♘e3 Ding himself played this variation with Black, after 10.♖e1 ♗e6 11.d4 exd3 12.exd3 ♕d6 he got a good position in the online game: ½-½ (54) Vachier Lagrave,M (2778)-Ding,L (2791) chess24.com INT 2020.

10...0-0 11.a3 ♖e8 12.b4 ♘g4!?



A curious pawn sacrifice that diverges from Ding Liren's previous game against Niemann. This was played after almost nine minutes of thought and while the engine doesn't quite approve of it, it may still have been an attempt by Nepomniachtchi to remember some preparation.

12...c5?! wasn't so great, and even though White was better after 13.b5 ♘c7 14.a4 eventually Black won in the online game: 0-1 (43) Ding Liren (2799)-Niemann,H (2642) chess24.com INT 2022;

12...♗f8 is the engine's preference, calmly solidifying the central pawn on e4.

13.♗b2 Ding declines the pawn sacrifice after thinking for 11 minutes.

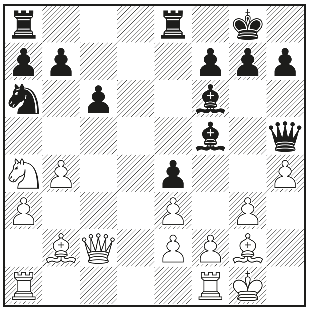
13.♗xe4 was one way to take the pawn. 13...♘c7 is the engine's way, though this does look too vague for a human. *(13...♕h5 is more direct, though after 14.h4 ♘xe3 15.dxe3 ♗h3 16.♗g2 Black doesn't seem to have much for the pawn.)* 14.♗g2 ♕h5 15.♘xg4 ♗xg4 16.♗b2 ♖ad8 leads to an interesting position where Black's central pressure offers him certain compensation.; 13.♘xg4 ♗xg4 14.♗xe4 was another possible capture, with a possible transposition to the lines after the immediate 13.♗xe4 after 14...♘c7 15.♗b2 ♕h5 16.♗g2 ♖ad8.

13...♕h5 14.h4 14.♘xg4 ♗xg4 15.♗xe4 ♘c7 with ...♖ad8 next leads to the position examined to the comments to White's 13.♗xe4. It appears that Ding decided not to touch the pawn on e4 in principle.

14...♗f6 Now Black defends the pawn on e4.

15.♕c2 ♘xe3 16.dxe3 ♗f5 The position is more or less balanced, but the difference is that while White can start his queenside play faster by pushing the b-pawn, he runs the risk of being attacked on the kingside after ...g5, when his doubled e-pawns serving as a wall that prevents him from bringing defences to the kingside.

17.♘a4?!



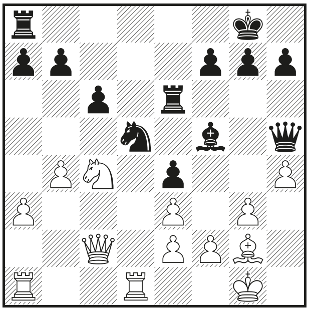
From this moment Ding starts to play without a sense of urgency, eventually succumbing to an attack on the kingside.

17.b5 was natural and much better. After 17...♘c7 18.bxc6 bxc6 19.♘a4 ♘d5 the position remains tense.

17...♗xb2 The engine prefers moving the bishop back to e7 or even d8, though this exchange looks natural to a human: Black gains tempo to bring the knight on a6 back to the game.

18.♘xb2 ♘c7 19.♘c4 ♖e6 Black builds up his position in the centre and on the kingside with the threat of ...g5 hanging like the Sword of Damocles over White's position.

20.♖fd1 ♘d5



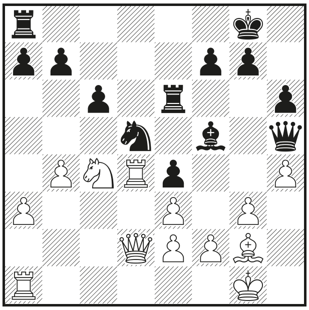
21.♖d4? Again not feeling the urgency of the position. Black maximised the position of his pieces and is ready for ...g5, but White still tries to do the same when there is no time for it.

21.b5! was the only way to stir up some trouble on the queenside. 21...g5 22.bxc6 bxc6 23.hxg5 ♖ae8 leads to an unclear position. Black threatens to take on g5 and double on the h-file, but that is time-consuming and should allow White to create counterplay.

21...h6? Too slow from Nepomniachtchi too.

21...g5! was very strong. After 22.hxg5 ♕xg5 23.b5 ♖h6 Black's attack is too fast with ...♕h5 coming next.

22.♕d2?



Still too slow. Now White has no way back.

22.♖ad1! was better, with the idea to sacrifice an exchange on d5 as a way to distract Black from the attack on the kingside. For example 22...g5 23.♖xd5! cxd5 24.♖xd5 gxh4 25.♘d6! with a messy and unclear position.

22...♖ae8 Now Black has the time for this final preparatory move before pushing ...g5.

23.♔h2 A desperate attempt to defend with ♖h1.

23...♗g4 This puts pressure on the e2-pawn while ...g5 is still in the air.

23...g5 was possible, after 24.♖h1 gxh4 25.♔g1 h3 Black is winning as White's rook on h1 is out of play.

24.♘a5 The house is on fire, but Ding goes pawn collecting on the queenside. Not that he could do much, anyway.

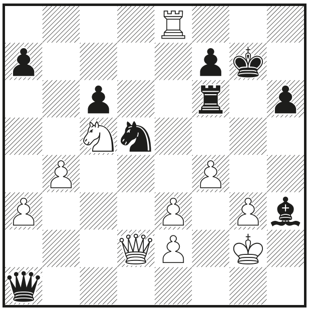
24...♖f6 The immediate ...g5 was also very good.

25.♔g1 g5 26.♘xb7 26.b5 was more resilient, though Black should win after 26...gxh4 27.bxc6 hxg3 28.fxg3 ♕e5 but at least this would have introduced some randomness in the position.

26...gxh4 27.♘c5 h3 28.♖xe4 28.♗xe4 h2+ 29.♔g2 ♕h3+ 30.♔h1 ♖xf2 is equally hopeless.

28...hxg2 29.♖xe8+ ♔g7 30.f4 30.♔xg2 ♖xf2+! 31.♔xf2 ♕h2+ 32.♔f1 ♗h3+ 33.♔e1 ♕g1# is a pretty mate.

30...♕h1+ 31.♔f2 ♕xa1 32.♔xg2 ♗h3+



After 32...♗h3+ White is mated: 33.♔xh3 ♕h1+ 34.♔g4 h5+ 35.♔g5 ♕h3

0-1

It has been said throughout this tournament that Nepomniachtchi had a lot of luck on his side and that he was given a lot of free gifts by the players. That may be the case, but had he not played well and stayed calm, he wouldn't have managed to get in a position to receive such gifts or for luck to come his way.

The game against American Fabiano Caruana from round two is a good example: In the Italian Game, Caruana, playing with black pieces, stunned his opponent with a well-prepared surprise early on in the opening. Facing Caruana's early bombshell, Nepomniachtchi did not lose heart - he sacrificed a pawn and skilfully defended in a very complicated position. In the end, it was the American who blinked.

Ian **Nepomniachtchi** - Fabiano **Caruana**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (2.3)

Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic

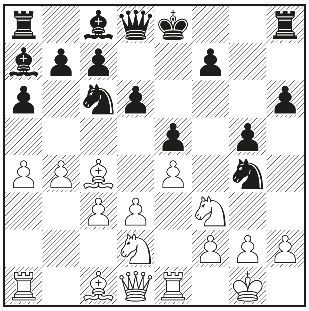
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 Caruana doesn't go for the opening that greatly helped him win the 2018 Candidates in Berlin - the Petroff.

3.♗c4 ♘f6 Carlsen's preferred move-order from his match with the same opponent to enter the Giuoco Piano, as the lines after 4.♘g5 are considered good for Black.

4.d3 ♗c5 5.0-0 d6 Lately the plans with a quick castle and ...d5 have become trendy, but fashion changes so fast in the Italian.

6.c3 a6 7.a4 ♗a7 8.♖e1 h6 9.♘bd2 g5!? Very sharp choice by Caruana and one I didn't expect. Castling short leads to calmer play.

10.b4 ♘g4!?



And here comes the novelty! The usual moves are 10...♘h7 or 10...♘h5, but Caruana opens a new page in the already very dense Italian novel. It's curious that he called it "borderline losing" and "a huge gamble" and he relied on the probability of his opponent not having analysed it too deeply.

11.♖e2 ♕f6 Black develops his pieces actively. The queen from f6 controls the d4-square and the f-file.

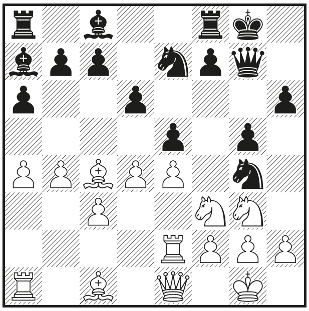
12.♕e1 12.h3?! runs into various problems, for example 12...♘xf2 *(or 12...h5!?)* 13.♖xf2 ♗xf2+ 14.♔xf2 h5 with ...g4 to come, which gives Black good play.

12...♕g7 Keeping the queen on the long diagonal to control the d4-square.

13.♘f1 White cannot get rid of the annoying knight as 13.h3?! ♘f6 only gives Black a hook on the kingside that he can use by pushing ...g4.; 13.d4 is an attempt to open the game in the centre immediately. The engine doesn't like it after 13...exd4 14.e5 0-0! claiming that White has nothing and is much worse.

13...0-0 14.♘g3 ♘e7 Covering the f5-square.

15.d4!?



White opens the game in the centre, but sacrifices a pawn. It needs to be said that Nepomniachtchi was obviously caught in the opening by Caruana's new idea while Caruana kept on playing his moves quickly.

15...exd4 16.cxd4 ♘c6 17.♖a3 This was the move that set Caruana thinking for the first time.

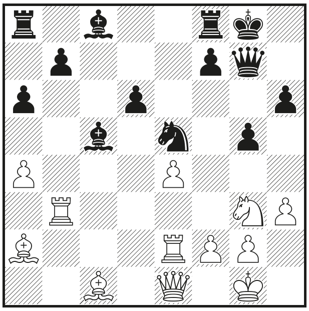
17.♗b2 is what the engines prefer. After 17...♘xd4 18.♘xd4 ♗xd4 19.♗xd4 ♕xd4 20.♖c1 ♕f6 White has certain activity and a safer king as compensation for the pawn.

17...♘xd4 18.♘xd4 ♗xd4 19.h3 ♘e5 20.♗a2 c5 Black solidifies the bishop on d4.

20...♗e6!? was an alternative 21.♖d2 *(21.♘f5 ♗xf5 22.exf5 ♖fe8* gives Black a solid position.*)* 21...c5 22.♘e2 ♗xa2 23.♖axa2 ♘c4 24.♖d1 ♖ac8 leads to a murky position.

21.bxc5 ♗xc5 Recapturing with the pawn was also possible, but Caruana plays with tempo, attacking the rook on a3.

22.♖b3



A natural human move.

22.♕d1! is an amazing resource pointed out by the engine. White simply sacrifices an exchange and banks on a lot of things: safer king, bishop pair and control of the dark squares. After 22...♗xa3 23.♗xa3 ♖d8 24.♖d2 he is not worse at all!

22...b5! Black activates his queenside pawns thanks to the vulnerable position of the bishop on a2 in case of the openinig of the a-file after axb5 axb5.

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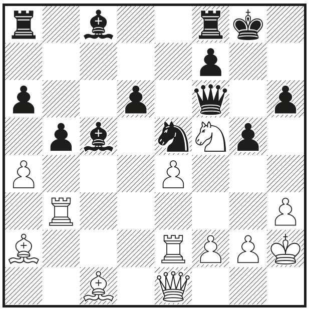
Ian Nepomniachtchi - Fabiano Caruana

23.♘f5 ♕f6 23...♗xf5 was a more forcing way. After 24.exf5 bxa4 25.♖g3 ♕f6 26.♕d1 White has compensation for the two pawns thanks to his control of the light squares and the strong unopposed light-squared bishop.

24.♔h2!?



A move that reminded me of Kasparov's famous 31.♔h2 in his games with Karpov: the first one in game 16 in Leningrad 1986 and the second one in game 20 in Lyon in 1990!

24.h4!? is the engine's way to add more fuel to the fire. The position is a complete mess after 24...♗xf5 25.hxg5 hxg5 26.exf5 ♖fe8 27.♗b2; 24.♘xh6+?! doesn't really work,

but it explains White's choice: 24...♕xh6 25.♖g3 ♕h4! and the rook on g3 hangs because of the pin on the g1-a7 diagonal - now you see the logic behind White's game move, to remove the king from g1 so the rook on g3 doesn't hang.

24...bxa4 25.♖g3 ♔h7 Caruana still refuses to get rid of the knight on f5.

25...♗xf5 26.exf5 ♔h7 27.♕d1 ♖ac8 is still very tense.

26.♕d1 26.f4!? opens the g-file. After 26...gxf4 27.♗xf4 ♗xf5 *(27...♖g8 28.♖xg8 ♔xg8 29.♘xh6+ ♔f8 30.♕g3 ♕g7 is another very complex option.)* 28.♗xe5 ♕xe5 *(28...dxe5 29.♖f3! ♕g7 30.♖xf5 ♖ac8 the opposite-coloured bishops ensure White against any problems.)* 29.exf5 ♕f4 Black keeps the pin on the rook on g3. 30.♗xf7! a great shot! 30...♖xf7 31.♖e7 ♖af8 32.♕e6! forces an equal queen endgame after 32...♗g1+! 33.♔xg1 ♕xg3 34.♖xf7+ ♖xf7 35.♕xf7+ ♕g7 36.♕e6 when White's strong passed f-pawn and Black's weak king compensate for the pawn deficit.

26...♗d7 Finishing development deep into the middlegame and defending the pawn on a4.

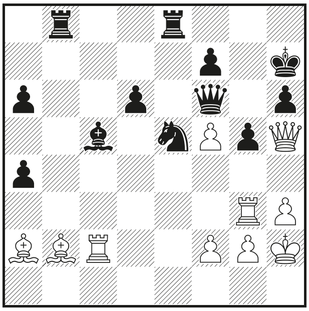
27.♖c2 27.♘e3 avoids the exchange of the knight. 27...♗e6 takes control over the d5-square. The position is very tense, for example 28.♗xe6 fxe6 29.♗b2 a3 30.♗xe5 ♕xe5 31.♘g4 ♕f4 32.e5! with complications where nobody is better.

27...♗xf5 Only now, after White has removed his heavy pieces from the e-file, does Caruana eliminate the knight.

28.exf5 ♖ab8 Caruana controls the b-file and the b2-square in particular - now in case of ♗b2 he will have the option to eliminate the strong bishop with ...♖xb2.

29.♕h5 ♖g8 30.♗b2 30.f4 gxf4 31.♖xg8 ♖xg8 32.♗xf4 ♘d3! is good for Black, but not that clear-cut for humans. After 33.♗xf7 ♘xf4 34.♗xg8+ ♔xg8 35.♕e8+ ♔h7 36.♖c4 ♘d5 37.♖xa4 ♕xf5 Black should be able to consolidate and win.

30...♖ge8



30...♖xb2! was the first moment Caruana could have eliminated the bishop. It looks promising, though with little time on the clock he decided against it on this occasion. 31.♖xb2 a3 32.♖b7 ♗xf2 33.♖xa3 d5! is the only move to keep Black's advantage and not an easy one to spot from afar. The point is that White cannot take the pawn 34.♗xd5? as after *(34.g3 is best, closing the h2-b8 diagonal, but after 34...♕c6! threatening ...♕xb7 and ...♕c1 Black takes over the initiative and should win.)* 34...♕d6 there are too many threats - the bishop on d5 and the rook on a3 are hanging as so is a discovered check.

31.♗c1 ♖g8 32.♗b2 Testing each other. Black again has the chance to take on b2 but Nepomniachtchi, lacking a better option, hopes that Caruana, with little time on the clock, will pass again.

32...♖ge8 Choosing safety.

33.♗c1

½-½

A sensible decision by Caruana, he didn't want to risk in time-trouble that early in the tournament.

The results Nepomniachtchi achieved against each of his opponents also confirm that he knew when to push and when to hold: he won both of his games against Firouzja, scored one victory each against Rapport, Ding and duda, and drew both times against Caruana and Nakamura. He also drew both games against Radjabov which may seem surprising given that the latter was not seen as the favourite, but the player for Azerbaijan has shown in Madrid he is much tougher than many have thought.

Nepomniachtchi's confident performance - noticeable not only in his play but also in his interviews and the way he carried himself in Madrid - truly resembled that of a winner.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SECOND PLACE

There was one big oddity about this tournament: despite not knowing who will win, it was clearer that the victor will be participating in the match for the world crown than who he would be facing!? This is all because Magnus Carlsen's strong hints that he may not defend his title, especially if someone from his generation wins, particularly Nepomniachtchi whom he comfortably defeated in the match in Dubai at the end of 2021.

FIDE regulations for the 2022 Candidates Tournament stipulate that the winner of the event 'shall become the Challenger and play a match versus the current Champion for the World Championship title.

If one of the participants of the World Championship Match 2023 refuses to play, he shall be replaced by the player who finished second in the FIDE Candidates Tournament 2022.

If the further replacement is required, the player who finished third in the FIDE Candidates Tournament 2022 shall be invited.'

In light of the above, the importance of second place in Madrid was almost equal to that of the first place! However, if you asked the players - and they were asked - they said they're 'not thinking about it'. But, as the saying goes - *time will tell*. And it did: when the critical moments of the final rounds hit, one of those who had a shot at second place showed more interest in the mathematics behind the standings and the scoreboard than on the chessboard.

THE 8-MINUTE 'GAME'

One of the most decisive games in the tournament was played in round twelve, when Ian Nepomniachtchi was White against Hikaru Nakamura. Nepomniachtchi was on eight points, while Nakamura had six

In case Nakamura scored, he would have had seven points and, with two more rounds to go, would have had chances to catch up with Nepomniachtchi. Still, by all accounts, that was a long shot for the world's top chess streamer from the US.

What followed was a 14-move blitz exchange in a drawn line of the Berlin variation of the Ruy Lopez. As Grandmaster Robert Hess, who was commenting in the live broadcast of the event, said: the players 'tried to at least wait until the photographers leave' to finish the 'game'.

Neither side came looking for a fight that day. After seven minutes and 47 seconds, Ian Nepomniachtchi stopped the clock and called the arbiter to say it was a threefold repetition.

Here is the 'game': 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.O-O ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.dxe5 ♘xb5 7.a4 ♘bd4 8.♘xd4 ♘xd4 9.♕xd4 d5 10.exd6 ♕xd6 11.♕e4+ ♕e6 12.♕d4 ♕d6 13.♕e4+ ♕e6 14.♕d4 ♕d6 ½ - ½

In the post-'game' interview, Nakamura said that he didn't think 'the risk-reward was there' and that, had he lost, 'there's no shot at second place'. So, calculating off the board was on the top of the agenda, for both.

He also said: 'Caruana is taking huge risks. So it's very clear that Fabiano does

not believe for a second that second place is in play. It's very clear that he thinks Magnus is full of… baloney. I generally have the same attitude as well, but I still want to have a chance if maybe there's a backdoor option, to get to second place… Realistically, I don't think it's there, but it's still something where - if there's a chance - you want to have that possibility'.

While many will be disappointed by the choice of both players (especially if they'd paid for tickets to watch the round, and many did) - the decision of the players made sense from their point of view. Nobody has fared well against Nepomniachtchi in this tournament and by opting for a safe draw, Nakamura came a step closer to that all-important second place. Nepomniachtchi on the other hand was edging further to claiming the second consecutive title in the Candidates.

However, with the decision not to fight, both players have put their fortune in the hands of others and, sometimes in life, fortune does favour the brave and not the savvy. And, so it happened that in the final game, in the direct duel for second place where he just needed a draw, Nakamura lost to Ding Liren, having made a blunder in an even position from which he couldn't recover. He was half a point short for second place.

THE MISFORTUNATE HIKARU NAKAMURA

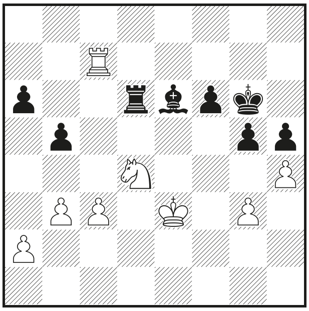
Nakamura's tournament didn't look so promising at the start as in round one he was defeated by Fabiano Caruana. However, he immediately made a comeback in round two, defeating Tiemour Radjabov and continued strongly (almost) until the end.

The round two game against Teimour Radjabov was important for Nakamura psychologically, and he played it well. In the Ruy Lopez, White (Nakamura) got a slightly better position after Black failed to find the optimal moves in the opening. White gradually increased pressure on his opponent who was constantly on the back foot. Most likely it would not have been enough for a victory had Radjabov not given up a pawn on move 35. The rest of the game was not smooth sailing for Nakamura but his patience and determination eventually paid off.

Nakamura banked on Radjabov forgetting the correct way to equalise in one line of the Berlin with 4.d3 and guessed right. However, Radjabov defended well and managed to neutralise White's initiative. Then the following position was reached.

Hikaru **Nakamura** – Teimour **Radjabov**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (2.2)
Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic



Nakamura couldn't capitalise on his interesting opening idea and here he has some small pressure thanks to his more active rook. But if Black just keeps tight and doesn't panic White cannot make progress. However, in extreme time-trouble, with seconds left to reach move 40 (remember, no increments in Madrid before move 61!) he blundered:

35...♖d5?? Black is not blundering the bishop because he has 36.♘xe6 ♖e5, but he does blunder a pawn.

35...♗g4 or just shifting the bishop to another square, was more than sufficient. If White creates a passed pawn with 36.c4 bxc4 37.bxc4 gxh4 38.gxh4 ♖b6 with the ideas of ...♖b2 and the advance of his own passed f-pawn Black should be fine.

36.♖c6 A simple double attack that wins the pawn on a6. The conversion wasn't perfect, but eventually Nakamura made it and won on move 75.

1-0

……

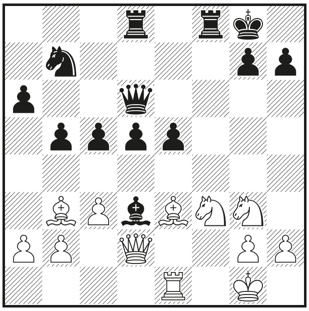
Nakamura's moment of truth was in round eight, at the start of the second part of the tournament when he defeated Fabiano Caruana. Not only did Nakamura serve sweet revenge to the player who defeated him in round one, but he knocked out the only other candidate who was close to Nepomniachtchi and took his place.

Following the Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez in which Black trades a knight and a bishop for a rook and a pawn (a line that was heavily tested back in the 1940s) a sharp position developed where black pieces had space but White had the counter-initiative. Both sides seemed well prepared as they were blitzing the opening moves but Caruana gradually fell into time trouble. First, he advanced the 'wrong' central pawn and then allowed White to activate his passive bishop which immediately gave Nakamura the advantage. Despite ending in a hopeless situation Caruana refused to surrender, putting his compatriot to serious challenges towards winning a won position. In the end, after over six hours of play (out of which he was winning in the last three), Nakamura succeeded.

Hikaru **Nakamura** - Fabiano **Caruana**

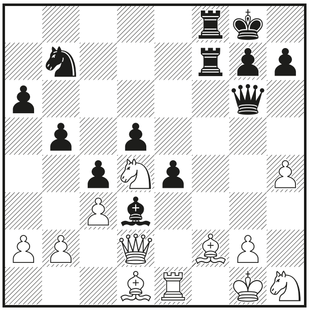
FIDE Candidates 2022 Madrid ESP (8)
Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3 ♗c5 10.♘bd2 0-0 11.♗c2 ♘xf2 12.♖xf2 ♗xf2+ 13.♔xf2 f6 14.♘f1 fxe5 15.♔g1 ♕d6 16.♗e3 ♗f5 17.♗b3 ♖ad8 18.♕e1 ♘a5 19.♕f2 ♘b7 20.♖e1 c5 21.♘g3 ♗d3 22.♕d2



The first and probably most important moment of the game happened in this position. Caruana protected his bishop with 22...c4 eventually weakening a critical d4-square, whereas after 22...e4 Black had nothing to worry about.

22...c4 23.♗d1 ♖d7 24.♗f2 ♖df7 25.♘h1 e4 26.♘d4 ♕g6 27.h4 Nakamura executed fine manoeuvres with his minor pieces, put pressure on the e5-pawn and forced Black to advance it to e4, giving up the d4-square. Caruana was trying to coordinate an attack on the white king, pinning the weak f1 square where White was being threatened with a checkmate. But Nakamura didn't seem phased at all. After about half an hour of thinking, he played 27.h4 - opening a path for his king but also making a counter-push on the kingside.



After 15 minutes of thinking, Caruana responded with a natural 27...♘c5. However, this move handed a sizable advantage to White, allowing him to push h5, which is exactly what Nakamura did after which he activated his bishop by getting it to g4

27...♘c5 28.h5 ♕d6 29.♗g4 h6 30.♕e3 ♕f4 31.♕xf4 ♖xf4 32.♘e6 ♘xe6 33.♗xe6+ ♔h7 34.♗xd5 In time trouble, Caruana went for an exchange of queens after which White took Black's central d5 square and got a decisive advantage as his pair of bishops was now dominating the board and his pieces were well coordinated.

The final portion of the game did not go as smooth for Hikaru as he wanted but his victory was never in doubt. Still, Caruana played on - until move 93! Along the way he gave up his rook for a bishop and tried everything to get his e-pawn promoted, but nothing worked. Nakamura's pieces were where they needed to be and his dominance of the position was unquestionable. Many will be asking should have Caruana played on given the position he had or not.

♖8f5 35.♗c6 ♖xh5 36.♗d4 ♖hf5 37.♘f2 ♖f7 38.b4 h5 39.a4 bxa4 40.♗xa4 h4 41.♗e3 ♖4f5 42.♖a1 h3 43.♖a2 hxg2 44.♗d1 ♖7f6 45.♗g4 ♖d5 46.♔xg2 ♖g6 47.♔g3 ♗f1 48.♗d4 ♗d3 49.♔f4 ♔g8 50.♗f5 ♖h6 51.♘g4 ♖hd6 52.♘e3 ♖b5 53.♗c5 ♖f6 54.♔e5 ♔f7 55.♘d5 ♖xf5+ 56.♔xf5 e3+ 57.♔e5 e2 58.♗f2 ♖b8 59.♗e1 ♖e8+ 60.♔f4 g5+ 61.♔g3 ♖e6 62.♔f2 ♖h6 63.♔e3 ♖e6+ 64.♔f2 ♖h6 65.♘e3 ♖f6+ 66.♔g3 ♖f1 67.♘g2 ♖f6 68.♗f2 ♔g6 69.♖a5 ♖e6 70.♘e1 ♗f5 71.♘f3 ♖d6 72.♘d4 ♗d3 73.♖e5 ♔f6 74.♘f3

1-0

A major upset in the tournament as with this defeat Caruana - who until round seven was breathing down Nepomniachtchi's neck - has now fallen a full point behind the leader. Nakamura, on the other hand, was now on 4.5 points and had joined the race for the top.

However, in the next round, Nakamura lost to Tiemour Radjabov, but then he came back, scoring three points in the next four games (two victories and two draws; one of them in just eight minutes against Nepomniachtchi). This meant that Nakamura entered the final round in second place, on 7.5, half a point ahead of Ding Liren.

THE GAME WHICH DECIDED SECOND PLACE

This was the most important game of the final round of the Candidates. Nakamura was in second place with 7.5 points, while Ding was third on seven. A draw would be enough to secure Nakamura's position as the runner-up, while only a victory worked for Ding.

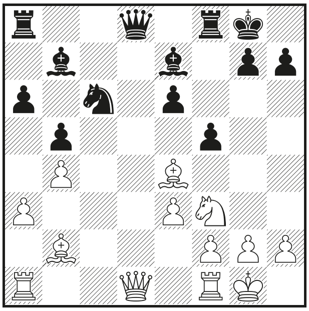
Ding was White and he was under pressure to win.

Liren **Ding** - Hikaru **Nakamura**

FIDE Candidates Madrid ESP (14)
Analysis and commentary by Milan Dinic

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 c5 The game started as a walk through several openings. Following 1.d4 ♘f6, it was looking like they are heading for a Nimzo/King's Indian, then the two entered the Semi-Tarasch but ended in the Queen's Gambit Accepted after Hikaru played 4...c5.

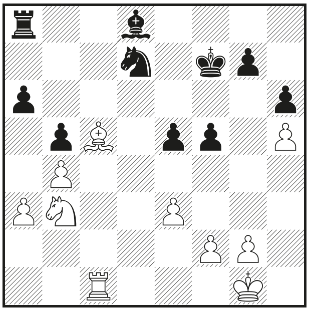
5.e3 ♘c6 6.a3 dxc4 7.♗xc4 a6 8.♗d3 b5 9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.b4 ♗e7 11.0-0 ♗b7 12.♗b2 0-0 13.♘e4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 f5 After White executed a standard operation of trading his c3-night Black's f6-night on the central e4-square Black responded with 14...f5, dislodging the bishop. By simplifying the position, Nakamura was closer to his desired result.



White attempted to find some initiative on the queenside but Nakamura held things together.

Ding avoided the exchange of pieces and was looking for a chance but Nakamura gave him none. He had to be careful not to over-push, especially as he was weaker on time.

15.♗b1 ♕xd1 16.♖xd1 ♖fd8 17.♗a2 ♔f7 18.h4 h6 19.♖dc1 ♗d6 20.♖c2 ♘e7 21.♘d4 ♗d5 22.♗xd5 ♘xd5 23.♖ac1 ♖d7 24.♘b3 ♗e7 25.h5 ♗f6 26.♗d4 e5 27.♗c5 ♗d8 28.♖d2 ♘f6 29.♖xd7+ ♘xd7 Finally, several pieces were exchanged and they transpired to the following position:



30.♖d1 In this case, taking on c5 would lead to simplifications but would have given chances for White. Nakamura, therefore, played:

30...♘f6 31.♗d6 ♘g4 32.♗c5 Played to open the d-file for the rook to come to d7, but Nakamura proceeded with:

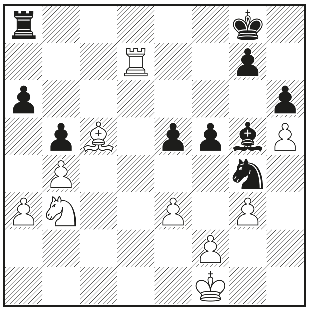
32...♗h4 attacking the f2 pawn. Ding instantly put his rook on the seventh rank.

33.♖d7+ This offered White most chances.

33...♔g8 34.g3 ♗g5 35.♔f1 the position was still even but it wasn't that simple. Both sides had to remain focused. But...

PDF NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES: WWW.XSAVA.XYZ

Ding Liren - Hikaru Nakamura



35...♗d8 In this position, Nakamura should have played the logical 35...Rd8 offers the exchange of the rooks as 36.Ra7 for example fails to 36...Rd3. Instead, Nakamura made a blunder with 35...Bd8 handing the advantage to White.

36.♖b7 Ding responded with logical 36.♖b7 and Nakamura found himself in deep trouble.

36...f4 37.gxf4 exf4 38.e4 Nakamura played 36...f4 looking for counter-chances and somewhat surprisingly succeeded as after 37.gxf4 exf4 and instead of taking, Ding played 38.e4, dropping the advantage.

Nakamura's best chance was advancing his pawn to f3, pinning the king on f1. Instead, he played:

38...♗f6 39.♘d4 After this move, Ding was in control again.

Black was looking for complications, but it was to no avail. Nakamura even advanced his pawn to f3 but it was way too late. Ding's pieces were positioned excellently - holding his own and pressing Black.

The following moves were about winning a won position. Ding played tenaciously - advanced but at the same time, his pieces were holding everything very well, just in case.

39...♖e8 40.♔g2 ♘e5 41.♘f5 f3+ 42.♔g3 ♘c4 43.♗e7 ♗b2 44.♔xf3 ♗xa3 45.♔g3 ♘e5 46.♗c5 ♘f7 47.f3 ♗c1 48.♖a7 ♗d2 49.♖xa6 ♗e1+ 50.♔g2 ♗c3 51.♖a7 ♘g5 52.♘e7+ ♔h8 53.♘g6+ ♔g8 54.♘e7+ ♔h8 55.♘d5 ♗b2 56.♖a2 ♗c1 57.♖c2 ♗a3 58.♗e3

After just over five hours of play, Nakamura resigned on move 58. With this victory, Ding secured second place.

1-0

A great stroke of luck for Ding who - having a very poor start to the tournament - made an amazing comeback in the second half and with this victory in the final round clinched second place, with 8/14. The second place could be relevant if world champion Magnus Carlsen decides not to defend his title.

Nakamura finished in shared third-fourth place, on 7.5/14 (he actually ended up fourth!).

THE FALL AND RISE OF DING LIREN

There were great hopes for Ding Liren ahead of this tournament and some saw him as one of the favourites.

Excluding the 2020/21 Candidates, World No 2. hasn't appeared in a big event since Covid began. He only managed to qualify for this year's Candidates following a marathon three-tournament race to get 28 rated games, score victories and become the world's second highest-rated player, to be eligible to appear in Madrid (and all thanks to Sergey Karjakin being banned so Ding took his place).

Ding Liren also was the last player to arrive in Madrid, just a day before the start. (Compare that decision to Nakamura's arrival of more than a week before the start, with enough time to acclimatise and settle down.)

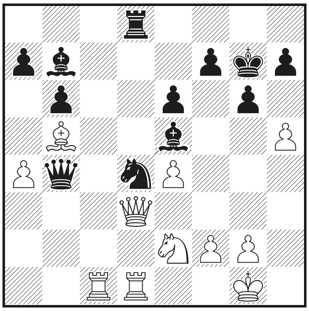
Ding got off to a slow, poor start. After suffering a crushing defeat in round one to Ian Nepomniachtchi, he drew the following seven games where in many cases he had solid chances for a victory but failed to convert.

One example is the game against Richard Rapport

Ding Liren – Richard **Rapport**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.1)

Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic



Black shouldn't have enough for the exchange, though certain tactical ideas remain. White's next move is a strong one that eliminates a lot of them.

22.♔f1! Avoiding checks on e2 and mates on g2!

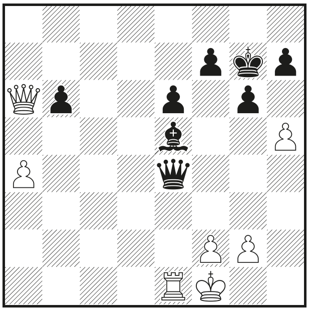
22...♘xe2 23.♕xe2? The second best option, but one that complicates matters. Now the win is not straightforward anymore.

23.♕xd8! wins more or less instantly, as Black has nothing after 23...♕xe4 (or *23...♘xc1 24.♕g5!* attacking the knight and introducing mating ideas after h6. *24...♘d3 25.h6+ ♔g8 26.♕d8+ ♕f8 27.♖xd3 ♗xe4 28.♖d7* with a winning position for White thanks to his active pieces.*)* 24.♗xe2 ♕xg2+ now it's not mate, thanks to White's 22nd move! 25.♔e1 ♕h1+ 26.♔d2 ♗f4+ 27.♔c3 ♕c6+ 28.♔b2 and the king hides from the checks and White remains a full rook up.

23...♖xd1+ 24.♖xd1 a6?! Black tries to simplify the position, but it allows White to obtain a winning position again. The only problem for White was that the win was very subtle.

24...♗d4! was better. After 25.♕c4 ♕xc4+ 26.♗xc4 e5 Black doesn't risk losing with that monster bishop on d4.

25.♗xa6 ♗xa6 26.♕xa6 ♕xe4 27.♖e1?

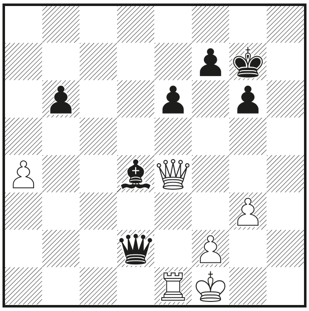


This natural move lets the win slip, but it was nearly impossible to understand that White had to keep the black queen away from the centre.

27.♕e2! ♕f5 28.hxg6 hxg6 29.♔g1 is winning for White according to the engine. The lines it gives are based on the fact that Black's pieces are lacking coordination to defend the b6-pawn and the kingside, but to understand this during a game requires inhuman abilities.

27...♕d4! Now Black is safe again.

28.♕e2 ♗f6 29.hxg6 hxg6 30.♕e4 ♕d2 31.♖e2 ♕d1+ 32.♖e1 ♕d2 33.g3 ♗d4



Black's coordination is immesurably superior when compared to the one he got after the precise 27.♕e2.

34.♕e2 ♕c3 35.♖d1 ♕c6 36.♕g4 e5 37.♖xd4 exd4 38.♕xd4+ ♔g8 39.♕d8+ ♔g7 40.♕d4+ ♔g8

½-½

……

However, all these draws gradually helped Ding move from the bottom and closer to the middle of the scoreboard. It was a question when rather than if his energy will come to shine in this tournament? And it did - starting from round nine as he defeated Jan-Krzysztof Duda.

Following an even position in the neo-Catalan, White transpired into a slightly better endgame in which Duda did not demonstrate necessary accuracy.

Ding Liren - Jan-Krzysztof **Duda**

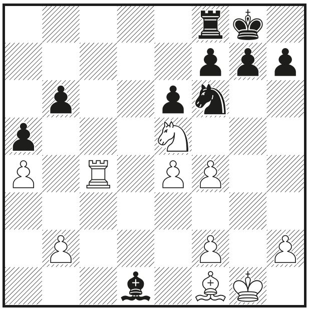
FIDE Candidates 2022 Madrid ESP (9)

Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

Ding opened with 1.c4 and the two transpired into the accepted variation of the neo-Catalan. Both sides castled short and finished development, with White getting a strong control of the d-file with the queen and two rooks.

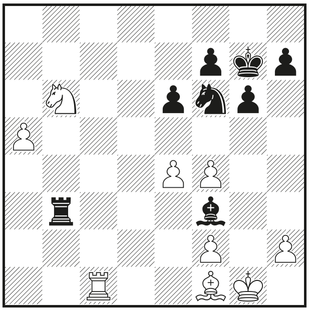
Ding Liren opted for a simplified line in which the queens and several stronger pieces were exchanged, leading to an even position.

Ding continued pushing on the queenside, aiming for Black's weak pawns there but Duda defended resourcefully and held his ground up to some point.



The Polish GM could have maintained equality with 28…♗b3 but he preferred a more active 28…♖d8 which was an interesting option. At some point, Duda ended two pawns down but got a dangerous counterplay against White's king.

Ding had to return one of the pawns, pinning his hopes on the a-passer. The position was still close to even as Black had his pieces well-positioned. Instead of restoring material equilibrium Duda made a seemingly active move and ended up in an unpleasant position.



After a simple 38…♗xe4 Black is OK, but Duda opted for a seemingly more active 38…♖a3 but it failed to 39.♘c4! followed by 40.Ne5 and White went for the f7-pawn. Duda immediately entered a lost position.

Ding still had to be careful but he played precisely and did not allow the victory to slip away, as he did with good chances in other games. After trading the knights, he gradually pushed his king towards the a-file, to help assist in the promotion of the queen. After five hours, Duda resigned.

1–0

Ding Liren

Ding scored two more victories - against Rapport and Fabiano Caruana. The biggest fight of the day and possibly the biggest upset of the tournament by that point was the duel between Fabiano Caruana and Ding Liren in round 11. After six and half hours of play, where both sides gained and dropped advantages, it was Ding whose nerves were steadier and who defeated Caruana in a stunning game.

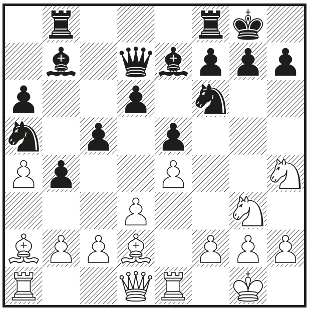
Fabiano **Caruana** – **Ding** Liren

FIDE Candidates Madrid ESP (11.4)

Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

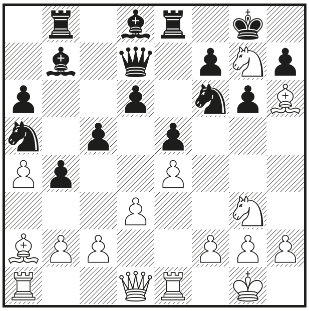
It was a very sharp game from the opening. The two opponents know each other well, having played many times (with Ding having a better score). This turned out to be a rollercoaster game.

In the Anti-Marshall system of Ruy Lopez, the game progressed really fast - after the first ten minutes, the two were already on move 15, when Caruana introduced a novelty.



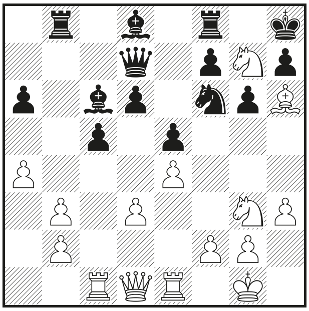
White is eyeing the f5-square and even may consider a knight sacrifice on f5, with potentially serious threats for the black king. Ding spent eight minutes thinking, before playing 15…g6.

Caruana responded with 16.♗h6 and then after 16…♖e8 proceeded with putting the h4 knight to f5. Accepting this sacrifice would have been suicidal for Black. With this in mind, Ding played 17…♗d8 and then Caruana put his knight on g7!



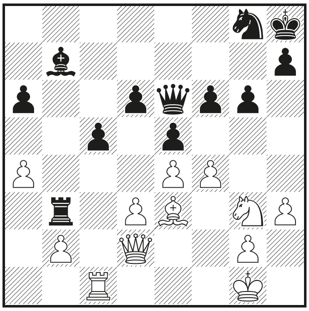
Caruana was playing fast, which suggests he was in his preparation. However, things weren't looking so clear for White.

Ding sacrificed a pawn on b3 with the goal of closing White's bishop on a2. Caruana opted to take the pawn with the bishop, relieving himself of a weak piece but ended up with a slightly worse pawn structure.



Here Caruana realised that his knight is in real danger and played 23.♘e6. Ding went into a deep think and responded with the strongest move 23..♕xe6. Soon after Black temporarily sacrificed an exchange, but he quickly got it back and the opponents reached a balanced and roughly equal position.

A few moves down the line and Caruana decided to open the f-file which was his only active option, although it did not promise much but, at this point, Ding miscalculated and made a serious inaccuracy.



Ding played 30…exf4? 31.♗xf4 g5 32.♗e3 ♕e5, attacking both b2-pawn and g3-knight but it turned out that after 33.♘f5! White's b-pawn is taboo (33…♖xb2 34.♘xd6!) which left the important f5-square undefended and ready for White's g3-knight to jump in and cause problems. The game took a new turn: White was better and Ding was in trouble.

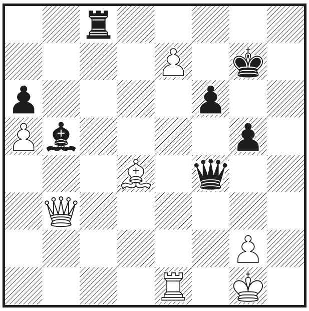
After an exchange of knights White proceeded to realign his bishop to c3, pinning the black king and exerting immense pressure on the f6 and g5 pawns.

Things were seemingly going well for Caruana but there was no decisive break in sight as Black was holding his ground. Right after reaching the time control, Caruana started losing steam and allowed Ding to almost equalise.

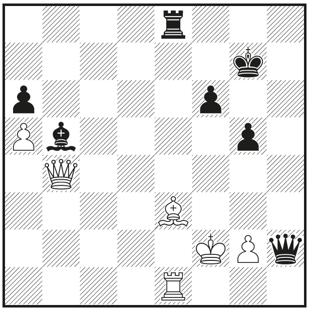
Still, White proceeded to exchange the d-pawn for Black's c-pawn. Having opened the diagonals towards the black king, Caruana then gave a few checks and pushed his e-pawn towards promotion.

Ding Lireng was showing strong resistance, playing very precisely.

On move 57, and after five and a half hours of play, Caruana committed his first serious inaccuracy.

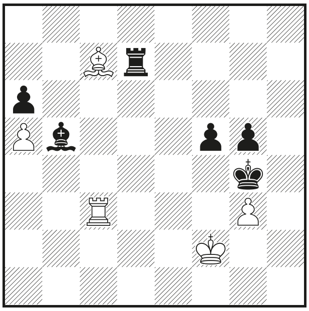


White imprudently played 57.Be3 but after 57…Qg3 Ding strongly hinted that he had some threats of his own forcing White to part with his e-passer. Following the promotion of the queen, under time pressure, Caruana made another mistake:



Fabiano Caruana

White had a chance to seal a draw with 61.Bxg5 but he missed it. Now it was Ding's turn and he pushed hard, aware that Caruana had just 15 minutes on his clock. Following the exchange of queens, it was clear that only Black had chances although White's position was holdable with precise defence. The best plan for White was to evacuate his king to the queenside, but Caruana preferred to keep it on the opposite wing. Apparently, he underestimated Black's potential threats.



This is the moment Caruana finally broke. He played the bishop from b8 to c7 and handed the victory over to Ding who penetrated with his rook to the second rank, ending in a completely winning position.

He allowed Black to get his rook on the second rank and knit a mating net around his king, handing Ding Liren a victory on a silver platter.

0-1

Caruana's shock and disbelief of what he had done were obvious. After resigning, he immediately rushed out of the playing hall. With this victory Ding Liren scored a hat-trick in the Candidates (the last time this was achieved was in 2013).

Ding's wave broke in round 12 when he was blown off the board in just 24 moves by Teimour Radjabov (see the game in the section about Radjabov). It was a catastrophic and poor performance which nobody would ascribe to a 2800 player.

Ding was down but not out. In round 13 he drew with Alireza Firouzja which meant he had 7/13 and was half a point behind second-placed Hikaru Nakamura whom he was playing in the final round.

THE TWO TOURNAMENTS OF FABIANO CARUANA

The four-time participant of the Candidates and 2018 winner, Fabiano Caruana was seen as one of the most likely players to take first place. As always - he was calm, confident, well prepared and determined.

Caruana started well. He had a tough challenge from round one, facing Hikaru Nakamura.

Nakamura relied on his trusted Berlin Defence, but in the middlegame showed uncharacteristic neglect for his king's safety.

Fabiano **Caruana** - Hikaru **Nakamura**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (1.3)

Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 Nakamura stays true to his trusted defence, so it was curious to see what Caruana prepared against it.

4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.♘bd2 One of the many setups White has at his disposal in this variation.

6...♗e6 Nakamura continues with the move he has chosen most often.

Nakamura famously lost to Caruana in their first Candidates Tournament six years ago in Moscow after 6...0-0 7.♕e2 ♖e8 8.♘c4 ♘d7 9.♗d2 ♗d6 10.0-0-0!? when White eventually developed a decisive kingside attack in: 1-0 (33) Caruana,F (2794)-Nakamura,H (2790) Moscow 2016.

7.0-0 Nakamura has faced the alternatives 7.♕e2 and 7.♘b3 against the same opponent.

7.♘b3 ♗b6 Nakamura's improvement. *(7...♗d6 8.♘a5 ♕c8 9.♗d2 0-0 10.♗c3 gave White some initiative in: ½-½ (71) Caruana,F (2823)-Nakamura,H (2779) Saint Louis 2016)* 8.♕e2 *(8.0-0 ♕e7 9.♗e3 0-0-0 10.♗xb6 cxb6 and Black's king turned out to be safer in the online game: 0-1 (41) Alekseenko,K (2698)-Nakamura,H (2750) chess.com INT 2022)* 8...♕e7 9.♗d2 a5 10.♗c3 ♘d7 was fine for Black in: 0-1 (54) Caruana,F (2808)-Nakamura,H (2785) Paris 2017; 7.♕e2 has also been tried by Nakamura as White. 7...♘d7 8.♘b3 ♗b6 9.♗e3 *(9.♘g5 ♘f8 10.0-0 ♗xb3 11.axb3 f6 12.♘f3 ♘e6* with a good position for Black in: 0-1 (45) Caruana,F (2802)-Nakamura,H (2786) Chess.com INT 2017) 9...♕e7 10.♘fd2 0-0-0 was fine for Black even though he eventually lost in: 1-0 (29) Nakamura,H (2736)-Firouzja,A (2728) Chess.com INT 2020.

7...♗d6 7...♘d7 is the main alternative. After 8.♘b3 ♗b6 *(8...♗e7?! 9.d4 f6 10.♘a5* Black was under pressure in: 0-1 (44) So,W (2767)-Nakamura,H (2745) Chess.com INT 2020) 9.♘g5 ♗xb3 10.axb3 ♕e7 is acceptable for Black: 1-0 (23) Giri,A (2790)-Carlsen,M (2851) Stavanger 2016.

8.♘b3 This is Caruana's deviation from the previous games played by his opponent. White has other tries as well, though Black holds comfortably everywhere. Nakamura hasn't faced this move, but it is still a well-known continuation.

8.d4 is a direct attempt, but after the more or less forcing 8...♘d7 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♘xe5 ♗xe5 11.f4 ♗d4+ 12.♔h1 f5! Black successfully establishes blockade on the light squares;

8.b3 is a slower attempt. Nakamura tried several moves against it. 8...0-0 *(8...♕e7?! 9.♘c4 ♘d7 1-0 (43) Svidler,P*

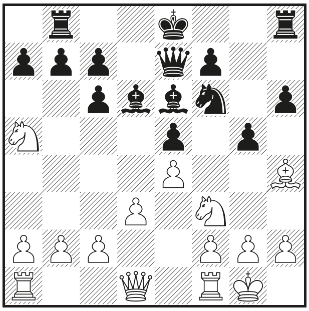
(2694)-Nakamura,H (2736) chess.com INT 2021 and here an improvement is 10.♘xd6+! cxd6 11.♘g5 with ideas like d4 and f4); 8...♘d7 is more precise than 8...♕e7. After 9.♘c4 0-1 (22) Svidler,P (2694)-Nakamura,H (2736) chess.com INT 2021 the simplest is 9...♗xc4 10.bxc4 ♕e7) 9.♘c4 *(9.♗b2 ♘d7 10.d4 f6 leads to a typical sturdy Berlin middlegame for Black. 1-0 (65) Carlsen,M (2855)-Nakamura,H (2736) chess24.com INT 2021)* 9...♘d7 10.a4 *(10.♘g5 ♗xc4 11.bxc4 h6 12.♘f3 ♖e8 was OK for Black in: 1-0 (32) So,W (2767)-Nakamura,H (2745) Chess.com INT 2020)* 10...♗xc4 11.bxc4 a5 with a balanced middlegame in the game: ½-½ (52) Caruana,F (2828)-Nakamura,H (2749) Chess.com INT 2019.

8...♕e7 After thinking for 11 minutes Nakamura allows the white knight to come to a5.

8...a5 9.♕e1!? a4 10.♘a5 ♕b8 11.b4 was a curious idea by White from the game: 1-0 (31) Dominguez Perez,L (2763)-Aronian,L (2765) Saint Louis 2019; 8...b6 is another attempt to prevent ♘a5. 9.d4 *(9.♗g5!? may be an improvement.)* 9...♘d7 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 12.♕h5 ♗f6 was problem-free for Black in: 1-0 (54) Vachier Lagrave,M (2784)-So,W (2770) chess24.com INT 2021.

9.♘a5 ♖b8 9...0-0-0!? was in line with some of Nakamura's other games where he aimed for opposite-side castling. It was played by Dominguez *(notice some other Dominguez games that Caruana was following, so it's quite probable that he prepared with him for this event)* *as Black. Nakamura said that he knew about the move but decided against it in order to avoid Caruana's preparation. 10.♗d2 (10.a3!? with the idea of b4 is interesting.)* 10...♗g4 11.♖b1 ♘d7 0-1 (51) Robson,R (2667)-Dominguez Perez,L (2739) Saint Louis 2019 and here 12.b4!?

10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4 g5



Ambitious play. Combining this with ...♖b8 means that Black's king will not find a safe haven on any side of the board. For the time being this is OK, but long-term Black must be careful about this factor. A calmer alternative was to castle.

12.♗g3 ♘d7 Defending e5 and preparing ...h5-h4.

13.d4 White must react in the centre.

13...f6 Black solidifies the centre and wants to continue with his plan of ...h5-h4.

14.♕d3 Judging by the engine's preferences the game was still in Caruana's preparation here.

14...h5 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♗xe5 It's logical to get rid of the possibly problematic bishop on g3.

16.♘xe5 fxe5 17.♕c3 ♕g7 18.f3 h4 19.♗f2 g4 gives Black good play on the kingside.

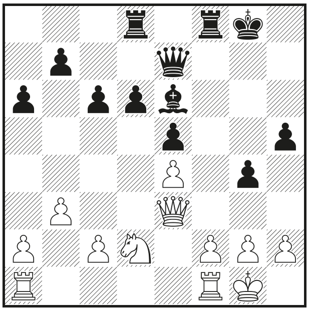
16...fxe5 A curious position of knights versus bishops, with the underlying factor of Black's king always an important detail.

17.♘c4 17.♕c3 was an alternative, putting pressure on e5. 17...0-0! the engine sacrifices the central pawn. The idea is that after 18.♘xe5 ♕g7 19.♘d3 ♕xc3 20.bxc3 c5 White's weaknesses and Black's pair of bishops in an open position give him good compensation.

17...♖d8 17...♗xc4 it was possible to preserve the dark-squared bishop. After 18.♕xc4 ♔d7!? is a very interesting way to solve the problem of the king. Nakamura was bothered by 19.♕b3!? when he couldn't move the rook from b8 to allow for a comfortable castling by hand.

18.♘xd6+ In case of 18.♕e2?! ♗xc4 19.♕xc4 ♔d7! is a better version of the same idea for Black, with ...♔c8 next and free attack on the kingside.

18...cxd6 19.♕e3 g4 20.♘d2 a6 21.b3 0-0?



Nakamura correctly criticised this decision. The king won't be safe on the kingside.

21...♖g8! with the idea of ...♕g5 was his suggestion and this is certainly better than the game move. He also keeps the idea of ...♔d7-c8 at his disposal.

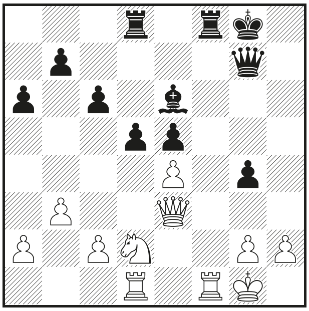
22.f3! White immediately opens the game on the kingside to try to get to Black's king. This is the move Nakamura underestimated and the reason for his mistake.

22.♕h6 is nicely met by 22...♕f6! 23.♕xh5? ♖d7! with ...♖h7 next, trapping the queen.

22...♕g7 22...gxf3 is playing into White's hands after 23.♖xf3 ♖xf3 24.♘xf3 Black has permanent problems on the kingside.

23.fxg4 hxg4 24.♖ad1 White wants to combine play on the kingside with pressure on the d6-pawn.

24...d5?

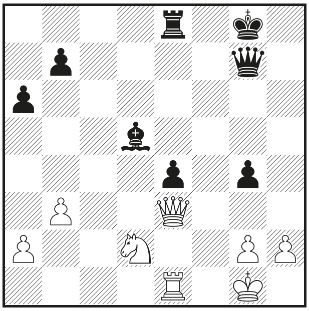


Nakamura felt that this wasn't right, but he didn't see how he could be punished. His intuition was again right, as now White is clearly better.

It was better to keep the position more compact with 24...♖d7 though it's clear that White has a stable plus after 25.a4!? as Black is rendered passive while White can keep improving the position. One idea he has is to transfer the knight to f1 and then either e3 or g3.

25.exd5 cxd5 26.♖de1 e4 27.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 28.c4! White consistently attacks Black's central pawns. He opens the game in the process and wants to get to Black's weak king.

28...♖e8 29.cxd5 ♗xd5



30.♘f1! From here the knight will come to the ideal blockading square on e3.

30...♕e5 31.♕h6 ♕g7 32.♕d6! Of course, with a safer king White won't exchange queens.

32...♗c6 33.♘e3 Nakamura felt that already here it was nearly impossible for a human to defend this position.

33...g3 Trying to confuse matters.

34.hxg3 The natural response.

34.♖f1! gxh2+ 35.♔h1 with threats like ♘f5 or ♖f4-g4 would have been the engine's way to finish the game off immediately.

34...♕e5 35.♕g6+ ♕g7 36.♕d6 ♕e5 37.♕h6 After repeating moves (both players were low on time and there is no increment before move 61 in Madrid) Caruana continues the game.

37...♕xg3 Fatal blunder according to Nakamura, though he acknowledged that the position was lost anyway.

37...♖f8 was his suggestion, but after 38.♕h4 Black is a pawn down with a weak king in what is ultimately a lost position.

38.♖f1! Joining the last piece in the attack.

38...♕g7 39.♕h4 An imprecision, but still winning.

39.♕d6! was the best move, but with little time on the clock as long as White doesn't blunder something major he should win.

39...♕h7 40.♕g3+ 40.♕f4! more or less wins immediately, with threats like ♘g4-f6 or ♘f5, but move 40!

40...♕g7 41.♕h4 ♗d7 The only move to prolong the game, taking control of the f5 and g4-squares.

42.♖d1 Imprecision, but the engine defence is unrealistic for a human, as Nakamura admitted.

42.♘f5 wins according to the engine, after 42...♗xf5 43.♖xf5 ♖e5 44.♕d8+ ♔h7 45.♖f4 White's attack on the king continues, the threat being ♖h4 and in case of 45...♖h5 46.♖xe4 White is a pawn up, though his king also starts to walk around after 46...♕a1+ 47.♔f2 ♖f5+ 48.♔g3 the engine is not concerned and defends with 48...♕g7+ 49.♔h3 ♖h5+ 50.♖h4 which obviously not a very human line;

In case of 42.♘d5? ♕d4+ Black saves himself as after 43.♔h2 ♕xd5 44.♕g3+ ♔h7 45.♖f4? which Nakamura initially thought was a mate, Black has *(45.♕h4+ is a perpetual.)* 45...♖e5 with ...♖h5 to defend and Black wins.

42...♗e6? Not the most resilient.

42...♖e7 was the only move. 43.♕f4 ♖f7 44.♕xe4 ♗c6 gives Black some hope as he activated his bishop at the expense of a pawn.

43.♘d5 Now White wins.

43...♖f8 43...♗xd5 44.♖xd5 with ♖g5 next wins on the spot for White.

44.♕xe4 ♕h6 44...♕f7 was what Nakamura initially wanted to play, but after White took on e4 he realised that he can play 45.♖d3 threatening ♖g3 while 45...♕f2+ is harmless after *(45...♗xd5 46.♖g3+ ♔h8 47.♕h4+ ♕h7 48.♕d4+ mates.)* 46.♔h2; 44...♕g4 is the trickiest try, when White should find 45.♕e1! keeping the rook on d1 defended and everything is under control.

45.♖e1 ♖d8 45...♗xd5 46.♕xd5+ ♔h8 47.♕xb7 is simply two pawns up for White.

46.♘e7+ ♔f7 47.♘f5 ♕f6 47...♗xf5 48.♕e7+ wins the rook on d8.

48.♖f1 Black loses material now.

48...♗d5 49.♘h6+ ♔g7 50.♕g4+ After 50.♕g4+ ♕g6 51.♘f5+ ♔f7 52.♘h4+ ♕f6 53.♕g6+ wins the queen and the game.

1-0

Caruana was breathing down Nepomniachtchi's neck in the first part of the tournament, trailing him by half a point. Following the victory over Nakamura he made four draws and then scored two confident victories over Firouzja and Radjabov.

However, in the second seven rounds, he lost four games and made just three draws! As if it was another Caruana. His tournament broke, his ambitions shattered.

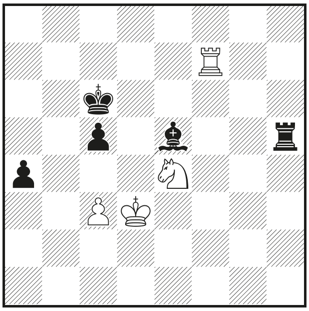
Caruana started with a defeat to Nakamura in round eight in which he played an excruciating losing position for hours (the game is analysed earlier in this article), and in the next three rounds, he made just one draw (with Rapport), suffering defeats at the hands of Ding Liren and Jan-Krzysztof Duda. He then made two draws but in the final round suffered a crushing defeat to Alireza Firouzja.

In the last game to finish at the 2022 Candidates, which lasted for well over six hours, Fabiano Caruana lost as White against Alireza Firouzja. In the Berlin line of the Ruy Lopez, the position was mostly even until Caruana miscalculated in organising an attack on the black king and allowed Firouzja to take the initiative. Despite standing significantly better, Firouzja didn't play very precisely, allowing Caruana chances to make a comeback. In the end, Caruana managed to narrow Black's advantage and get into a position which was uncomfortable but where he could hold.

Just as he was reaching the second time control, this happened:

Fabiano **Caruana** - Alireza **Firouzja**

FIDE Candidates Madrid ESP (14)



Here Caruana just played his knight from d2 to e4. He was immediately lost. He should have put the knight on f3. After:

60...♖h3+ 61.♔d2 ♔d5 62.♘f2 ♖xc3 63.♖f5 ♖g3

Caruana resigned.

0-1

A crushing loss and a devastating end for the former winner of the Candidates and a silver lining for Firouzja.

A sad ending for Caruana who had an excellent first part of the tournament, just a step behind Nepomniachtchi. However, he broke in the second part and didn't recover until the end. With 6.5/14, Caruana finished the event in fifth place, well below his play and strength.

AMBITION BURNOUT: ALIREZA FIROUZJA

The person many have put their hopes in winning the Candidates (including Magnus Carlsen by saying that he'd be willing to play a world championship match against him) is Alireza Fioruzja. What added to high expectations was that Fioruzja even retreated from chess life in the past nine months, supposedly, to prepare for the Candidates.

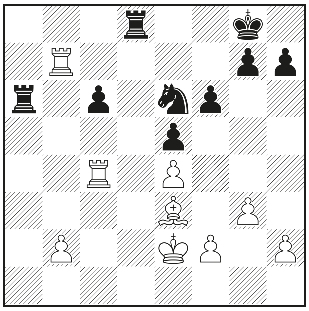
The Iranian-born Frenchman was the youngest participant in Madrid and he celebrated his 19th birthday there. However, apart from his birthday, there wasn't much reason for celebrations regarding his performance in the Candidates.

At the start Firouzja played very solidly, making some tough draws in complicated positions against more experienced players. His round three game against Nakamura was a lucky escape for the American. However, it was obvious that Fiourzja played over-optimistically in many games.

The following game featured a mistake based on premature activity in the endgame. This decision is similar to the ones pointed out in the game Caruana-Firouzja played in the Grand Swiss event in Riga last year. There Firouzja also opted for dynamic counterplay in situations where it was not optimal. You can check the full analysis of that game in the December issue of BCM and compare to this one.

Richard **Rapport** - Alireza **Firouzja**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (2.1)
Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic



Playing on his birthday, Firouzja was suffering from a constant slight disadvantage from the opening. He was always very close to equality but never quite there.

30.f4 Rapport continues to put pressure on Black's position. He can keep the tension in the centre, he can push f5 and continue with kingside expansion, or he can take on e5 and try to attack that pawn.

30...♘d4+? A mistake in evaluation. Firouzja plays for activity in the rook endgame, but he ends up with one active rook against White's two!

30...h5 was a better option, not rushing forward and banking on the solidity of

Black's position. The move stops White's kingside expansion with g4, while taking on e5 brings little to White. 31.fxe5 *(31.f5 ♘d4+ 32.♗xd4 exd4 33.♔d2 ♔h7! is a nice bonus for having advanced the h-pawn - the king is activated via h6 and later g5.)* 31...fxe5 and White cannot find a way to get to the pawn on e5 as the knight controls all the important squares.

31.♗xd4 exd4 32.♔d2 A precise move.

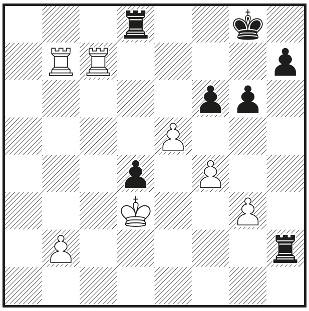
32.♔d3? is wrong as after 32...♖a1! the king is subject to a check from d1.

32...♖a1? Another mistake, this time a decisive one.

32...h5 again was keeping things under control. The point is that Black has no reason to panic as White cannot take the pawn on d4 after 33.♖bb4 because now 33...♖a1! works - this time Black's active rook compensates for the pawn deficit very nicely: 34.♖xd4 ♖xd4+ 35.♖xd4 ♖h1 36.h4 ♖g1 37.♖d3 ♖g2+ 38.♔c3 ♖e2 and Black regains the pawn.

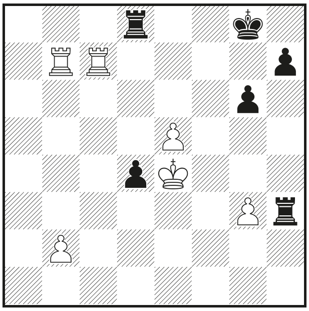
33.♖xc6 ♖h1 34.♖cc7 Allowing two rooks on the seventh rank is almost always bad and this position is no exception.

34...♖xh2+ 35.♔d3 g6 36.e5!



White adds a passed pawn to his advantages of better rooks and a more active king.

36...fxe5 37.fxe5 ♖h3 38.♔e4?



Rapport had enough time, but he played fast and made this unnecessary imprecision very quickly. White is still winning, but things are not that simple after it.

38.♖g7+ ♔h8 39.♖gd7! was simplest - White will collect the d4-pawn and with his rook on the seventh rank, Black's cut-off king and the passed e and b-pawns a win should be relatively simple.

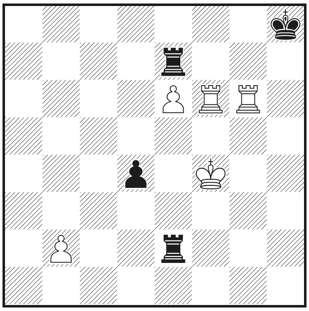
38...♖xg3 39.♖g7+ ♔h8 40.♖xh7+ ♔g8 41.♔f4 ♖e3 42.♖bg7+ White can give various checks and Rapport was spending a lot of time trying to figure things out. Things are very complex as White needs to understand which position of Black's king works best for him.

42.♖hg7+ ♔f8 *(42...♔h8 43.♖ge7 ♖h3 44.e6 d3 45.♖bd7! wins for White as he controls the d-pawn.)* 43.♖bf7+ ♔e8 44.♖e7+ ♔f8 45.b4 is winning for White according to the engine. It remains complex though, as White should combine the checks on the seventh rank with support of his passed pawns and control of Black's passed d-pawn.

42...♔f8 43.♖f7+ ♔g8 44.♖fg7+ ♔f8 45.♖f7+? Now the game should be a draw. White should have transposed to the lines given to the comments to White's 42nd move.

45.♖b7 ♔g8 46.♖hg7+ is a transposition to the comments to White's 42nd move. With the game move that is no longer possible because of a threefold repetition.

45...♔g8 46.♖hg7+ ♔h8 47.♖xg6 ♖e2 48.e6 ♖e8 49.♖h6+ ♔g8 50.♖g6+ ♔h8 51.♖ff6 ♖e7?



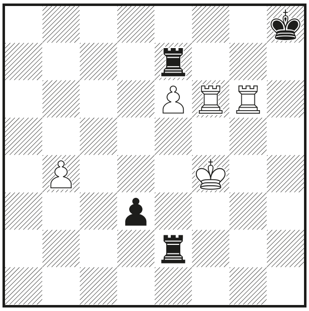
Firouzja also errs in this very difficult endgame.

51...d3 is one move to draw. 52.♔f5 ♖g8! is the difficult move. After *(52...♖f2+? 53.♔e5 ♖e2+ 54.♔d6 only helps White activate his king. Now 54...d2 runs into 55.♖h6+ ♔g7 56.♖fg6+ ♔f8 57.♖h8#)* 53.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 54.♖g6+ ♔f8 55.♖g3 ♖xb2 56.♖xd3 ♔e8 we reach the elementary Philidor position.; The immediate 51...♖g8 also works, with the same ideas. 52.♖h6+ ♔g7 53.♔f5 d3 and we have a transposition to the lines after 51...d3.

52.b4? Rapport misses a difficult win.

52.♔f5! d3 53.♖g1! d2 *(53...♖h2 54.♖f8+ ♔h7 55.♔f6 with ♖f7 next wins.)* 54.♖h1+ ♔g8 55.♖fh6! White plays for mate as the rook on e7 takes away the escape route for the king. 55...♖f2+ 56.♔e5 ♖e2+ *(56...♔g7 57.♖h7+ ♔f8 58.♖h8+ ♔g7 59.♔d6 and White wins as he controls the d-pawn while supporting his own passed e-pawn. In addition to this, Black's king is under the constant threat of different checks.)* 57.♔d6 ♖h7!? is a curious trick, but White refutes it by 58.♖g6+! (not *58.♖xh7? ♖e1!)* 58...♔h8 59.♖gg1! controlling again the d-pawn and winning with his own passed pawns.

52...d3



Now the passed d-pawn gives Black counterplay for draw.

53.♖g3 d2 54.♖h6+ ♖h7 55.♖xh7+ ♔xh7 56.♖d3 ♔g6 57.♔f3 ♖xe6 58.♖xd2 ♔f6 59.♔f4 ♖e1 60.♖d4 ♔e6

½-½

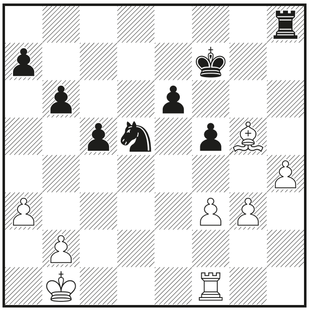
Firouzja played sharply and ambitiously in his first games.

In the following game, Firouzja caught Nakamura in preparation in the Nimzo-Indian. Black spent masses of time navigating the complications and managed to steer the game towards an equal, but playable endgame where it was Black who had to be a bit careful because of White's passed h-pawn.

Alireza **Firouzja** – Hikaru **Nakamura**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.4)

Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic



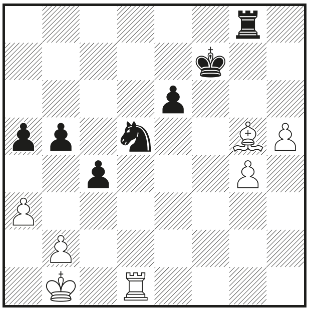
Black should be a bit careful about White's advance on the kingside, but his untouchable knight and good central control should assure him against trouble. However, having spent an hour and a half in the opening and early middlegame, Nakamura started to play faster in order to avoid time-trouble and now starts to make inaccuracies.

30...c4?! 30...e5! 31.g4 f4! is the correct idea - White obtains two connected passed pawns but the bishop in front of them gets in the way!

31.g4 Now White obtains a better version.

31...b5 32.♖d1 Threatening gxf5 when Black cannot recapture since the knight on d5 is hanging, thus forcing Black to take on g4.

32...fxg4 33.fxg4 a5 34.h5 ♖g8?



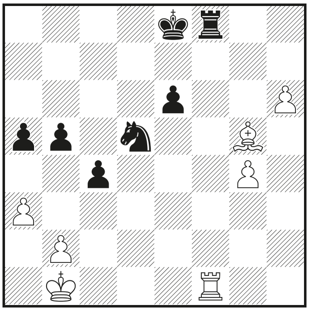
With little time on the clock here comes a more serious mistake.

34...b4! was more to the point, creating counterplay on the queenside. 35.♖f1+ ♔g7 36.♗d2 this doesn't even threaten g5 as the pawn on h5 hangs, but Black can allow it as his queenside counterplay is strong, for example 36...♖b8 37.axb4 axb4 38.g5 c3 39.♗c1 b3! when the game can end in perpetual check 40.bxc3 ♘xc3+ 41.♔b2 ♘a4+ 42.♔b1 ♘c3+.

35.♖f1+ ♔e8 35...♔g7 36.♗d2 is a much worse version for Black than the position after 34...b4 35.♖f1 ♔g7 - the rook is worse on g8 and the b-pawn is still on b5.

36.h6 Now the pawn is close to the promotion square and various tactical ideas are possible. For example, Black cannot capture the bishop as after h7 the pawn promotes.

36...♖f8!



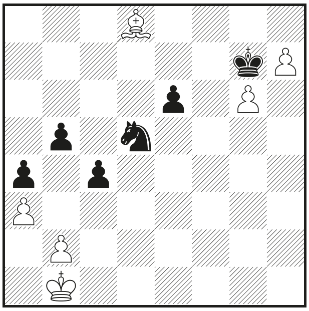
The only move to stay in the game.

37.♖xf8+? As in the previous round, Firouzja makes a mistake in the endgame. Here he tried to calculate the win until the end and missed Black's saving resource. I am pretty certain that endgame virtuosos from the past wouldn't have thought much (Firouzja spent 13 minutes on this decision) and would have avoided the rook exchange based on general considerations - White's rook is more active as Black's needs to keep an eye on the passed h-pawn.

37.♖c1! is a good technical decision. White cannot win on the kingside, where his pawns are under control, so it makes sense to employ the principle of two weaknesses - now White threatens a4 to break up Black's queenside structure. 37...♔f7 *(37...a4? 38.♗d2 blockades the queenside and allows for g5)* 38.a4 ♔g6 39.♗d2 bxa4 40.♖xc4 gives White a clear advantage.

37...♔xf8 38.♗d8 This forces Black's next and it appears that White wins: he paralyses Black's majority and then walks over with the king.

38...a4 39.g5 ♔f7 40.h7 ♔g7 41.g6



41...c3! The saving resource missed by Firouzja! This often happens when in technical positions the calculation isn't 100% precise. Therefore a lot of strong players tend to play moves where the outcome of the game does not depend on precise calculation of long and complicated lines - the probability of miscalculating is just too high.

To demonstrate how White wins in the absence of ...c3, let's examine 41...e5 42.♔c2 ♔h8 the knight must stay on d5 in order to prevent ♗f6, so Black is almost in a zugzwang. 43.♔d1 ♔g7 44.♗g5 c3 too late for this, but otherwise White plays ♔e1-f2-f3-e4. 45.bxc3 ♘xc3+ 46.♔e1 ♘d5 47.♔f1! avoiding that check on d3 from the line 46.♔f2? *(47.♔f2? is an unfortunate square: 47...b4! saves the game for Black. 48.axb4 a3 49.♗c1 ♘xb4 and Black has the saving check on d3!) 47...♔h8 (47...e4 48.♗c1 with ♗b2 next.; 47...b4 48.axb4 a3 49.♗c1 ♘xb4 50.♗xa3 ♘d3 now it's not with check, so after 51.♗f8+ ♔h8 52.♗e7 ♔g7 53.♗f6+ White promotes.)* 48.♔f2 ♔g7 49.♔f3 with ♔e4 next and White starts collecting material.

42.bxc3 Played after thinking for over an hour (!) but it was wiser to spend that time a bit earlier...

42.♗a5 cxb2 43.♔xb2 ♔h8 doesn't change the essence of the position - White cannot revert to the winning plan to the king march to the kingside and centre *(or 43...e5 with the idea of ...♘f4)*.

42...♘xc3+ 43.♔c2 ♘d5 44.♗g5 e5 If we compare the position to the line after 41...e5 then we see that there White played the move 47.♔f1 here. In our position the king is too far and this saves Black, for example

45.♔d2 45.♔d1 ♔h8 46.♔e1 b4! 47.axb4 a3 48.♗c1 ♘xb4 we have the same position as in the game.

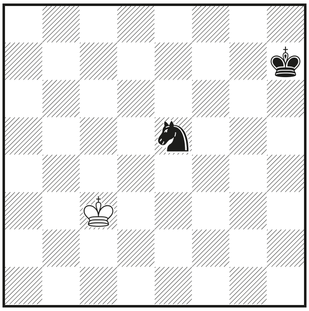
45...♔h8 46.♔e1 46.♔e2 ♘f4+! takes the pawn on g6 since the pawn endgame after ♗xf4 exf4 is winning for Black!

46...b4 The saving counterplay.

47.axb4 a3 48.♗c1 ♘xb4 49.♔d2 49.♗xa3 ♘d3+ comes with the check and the knight is in time to come to f4 to destroy the pawn on g6.

49...♘d5 Going to f4.

50.♗xa3 ♘f4 51.♗b2 ♘xg6 52.♗xe5+ ♘xe5 53.♔c3 ♔xh7



½-½

An amazing save by Nakamura and a bitter pill to swallow for the youngest player in the field, but these mistakes in the endgame that keep repeating themselves are not an accident and seriously diminish Firouzja's chances.

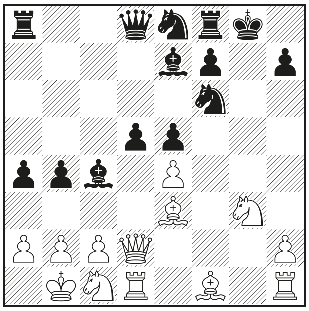
However, Firouzja's momentum totally broke in round four when Ian Nepomniachtchi beat him (he was to go on and beat him again in round 11). In this game and in others in which he lost, it was Firouzja himself who was his biggest enemy - playing over-ambitiously and going for an attack when it was completely uncalled for.

This game against Nepomniachtchi was the tale of the two kings in which only one would survive. In the Najdorf variation of the Sicilian, Firouzja - playing as Black - opted for a sharp double-edged line. He blitzed all his moves in the opening, but once he finished his preparation, Firouzja was struggling to find the right plan. The complicated position on the board - where opposite castled kings had their defence lines severely probed - required meticulous calculation. Here Firouzja fell short of the task: his sacrifice of material with the hope of a vicious attack on the white king came to nothing, while Nepomniatchni defended well, launching a devastating attack and then serving a tactical blow to his opponent, forcing him to surrender facing imminent checkmate.

Ian **Nepomniachtchi** - Alireza **Firouzja**

FIDE Candidates 2022 Madrid ESP (4)

Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic



Sensing it is a critical moment, Firouzja took his time assessing his options. The recently turned 19-year-old Frenchman spent an hour in total for the next two moves, while Nepomniachtchi was much faster.

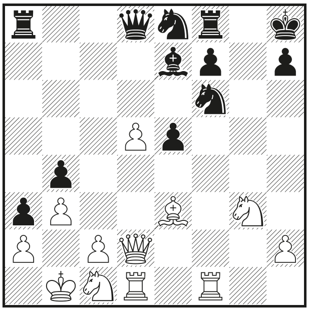
Alireza Firouzja - Ian Nepomniachtchi

Firouzja proceeded to advance his pawns to a3 and b4, trying to provoke weak squares around the white monarch, but Nepomniachtchi was responding logically and countered Black's advances with his own measures.

In the online commentary of the game, Judit Polgar noted that Firouzja 'seemed to know what he was doing but in the last few moves it seems struggling which direction to take'.

After moving his king to h8, Firouzja made a move after which White gained a huge advantage.

20...♗xf1 21.♖hxf1 a3 22.b3 ♔h8 23.exd5



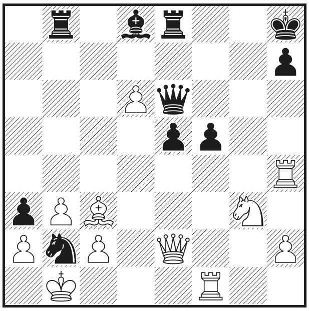
In this position, Firouzja put his knight on d6, blocking his bishop on e7 from defending the b4 pawn. While this move is in the spirit of the line, a sharp position like this one requires a meticulous calculation to the finest detail and this is where Firouzja fell short of his capabilities.

Nepomniachtchi did not hesitate - he took the pawn quickly. After 24…♖c8 the computer was saying White was completely winning. Black needed to have some strong compensation for the loss of material but it was simply not there.

Nepomniachtchi regrouped his pieces, pushed d-pawn and forced black to retreat his black-squared bishop which would have played an important role in any opening of the a1-h8 diagonal.

23...♘d6 24.♕xb4 ♖c8 25.♗b6 ♕d7 26.♕e1 ♖b8 27.♗a5 ♘c4 28.d6 ♗d8 29.♗c3 ♕e6 30.♘d3 ♘d5 31.♘f4 ♘xf4 32.♖xf4 f6 33.♕e2 ♘b2 34.♖df1 ♖e8 35.♖h4 f5

The position was still very sharp but Nepomniachtchi was very precise in calculating the tactics. Firouzja's attempts to complicate matters only precipitated his defeat.



This is the moment before the curtain was about to fall. Firouzja just played a desperate 35…f5, short on time, looking for a lucky break. But White gave no quarter: Nepo did not think long before playing 36.♖xh7+, winning immediately. After two more moves, Black resigned.

Firouzja overestimated his chances of playing sharply with Black and lost.

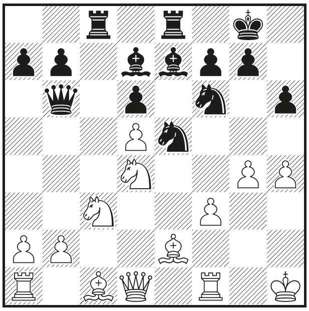
He was to repeat this overly-ambitious overstretching in his games against Nakamura and Nepomniachtchi again in rounds ten and eleven and he was punished in both.

Alireza **Firouzja** - Ian **Nepomniachtchi**

FIDE Candidates Madrid ESP (11.2)

Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

In this game - as in some others in Madrid - it was Firouzja who defeated himself: he prematurely started with an advance of his pawns on the kingside, launching an attack which not only brought him nothing but also quickly backfired. Firouzja deserves credit that he played ambitiously - as he did in every other game. But ambition which is not rooted in a fair dose of reality is, at this level of play, destined to fail.



White is behind in development, he was in no way ready for the pawn advance on the kingside but Firouzja didn't care.

In this position **18.g5 hxg5 19.hxg5 ♘h5** Nepomniachtchi emerged clearly better. In just three moves Firouzja completely wrecked his position and gave White a golden opportunity which he used and comfortably scored a point.

However, it should be noted that the 19-year-old's play in this game was

Stylish both
on and off the chess board:
Richard Rapport

probably also affected by lack of sleep. Firouzja spent the night before this round playing a long bullet match against GM Narodnitsky, which lasted until early hours of the morning.

Firouzja managed to draw the next two games - with Duda and Ding Liren, but in both games he was the one playing catch up.

In the final game he scored a victory against Fabiano Caruana, the only player who had defeated Firouzja in the Grand Swiss last year (from which he qualified to the Candidates). In this game Firouzja achieved a better position following Caruana's overambitious play. However, on several occasions he let his advantage slip and it was only thanks to Caruana's big blunder on move 60 that Firouzja was given victory.

The victory against Caruana was a silver lining for Firouzja, but overall - he had a poor tournament, playing tactlessly. After holding out in the early games he crashed after the defeat from Ian Nepomniachtchi in round four and never really came back. One thing Firouzja needs and he cannot get with any preparation is maturity. How he approaches the experience from these Candidates and how he works on his character will be key to him showing his best in future events. The Frenchman finished the tournament in sixth place, with six points after spending most of the event at rock bottom.

COURAGE AND CREATIVITY – RICHARD RAPPORT

Whatever Richard Rapport does after the Candidates, he should certainly consider employing Grandmaster Richard Hess as his PR. In almost every round Hess was repeating that every tournament organiser should invite Richard Rapport because he gives so much both on and off the board. And, Hess is absolutely right! Rapport - who qualified for the Candidates after coming second in the Grand Prix, played his money's worth in Madrid. Sometimes wearing a salmon-pink jacket, Rapport put his mark on the event both on and off the board.

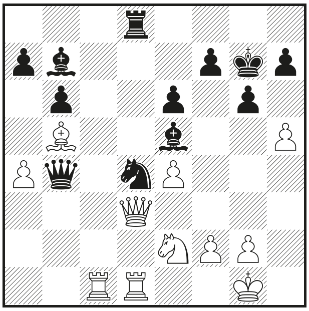
Unlike other players, Rapport spent a lot of time thinking on move one, quickly leaving theory behind and going for sharp and dynamic positions, interesting to watch and grippingly exciting. His performance in the tournament reflects that approach: he had ups and downs but at no point was he considered to be out of the tournament or an easy target.

In the following game, Rapport's creativity almost cost him a point, but also ended up saving him half a point.

Rapport chose the Grunfeld against Ding Liren and got an acceptable middlegame. Then, unexpectedly, he quickly went astray with a misevaluated exchange sacrifice. But after obtaining a position with excellent winning chances Ding Liren threw it all away.

Ding Liren – Richard **Rapport**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.1)
Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic



Black shouldn't have enough for the exchange, though certain tactical ideas remain. White's next move is a strong one that eliminates a lot of them.

22.♔f1! Avoiding checks on e2 and mates on g2!

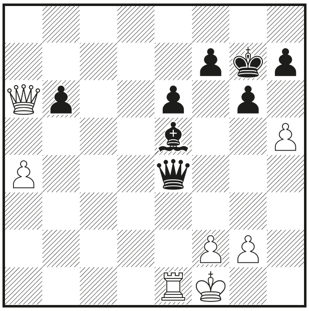
22...♘xe2 23.♕xe2? The second best option, but one that complicates matters. Now the win is not straight-forward anymore.

23.♕xd8! wins more or less instantly, as Black has nothing after 23...♕xe4 *(or 23...♘xc1 24.♕g5! attacking the knight and introducing mating ideas after h6. 24...♘d3 25.h6+ ♔g8 26.♕d8+ ♕f8 27.♖xd3 ♗xe4 28.♖d7 with a winning position for White thanks to his active pieces.)* 24.♗xe2 ♕xg2+ now it's not mate, thanks to White's 22nd move! 25.♔e1 ♕h1+ 26.♔d2 ♗f4+ 27.♔c3 ♕c6+ 28.♔b2 and the king hides from the checks and White remains a full rook up.

23...♖xd1+ 24.♖xd1 a6?! Black tries to simplify the position, but it allows White to obtain a winning position again. The only problem for White was that the win was very subtle.

24...♗d4! was better. After 25.♕c4 ♕xc4+ 26.♗xc4 e5 Black doesn't risk losing with that monster bishop on d4.

25.♗xa6 ♗xa6 26.♕xa6 ♕xe4 27.♖e1?

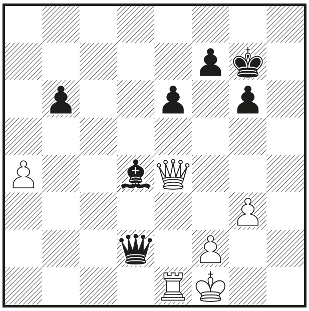


This natural move lets the win slip, but it was nearly impossible to understand that White had to keep the black queen away from the centre.

27.♕e2! ♕f5 28.hxg6 hxg6 29.♔g1 is winning for White according to the engine. The lines it gives are based on the fact that Black's pieces are lacking coordination to defend the b6-pawn and the kingside, but to understand this during a game requires inhuman abilities.

27...♕d4! Now Black is safe again.

28.♕e2 ♗f6 29.hxg6 hxg6 30.♕e4 ♕d2 31.♖e2 ♕d1+ 32.♖e1 ♕d2 33.g3 ♗d4



Black's coordination is immeasurably superior when compared to the one he got after the precise 27.♕e2.

34.♕e2 ♕c3 35.♖d1 ♕c6 36.♕g4 e5 37.♖xd4 exd4 38.♕xd4+ ♔g8 39.♕d8+ ♔g7 40.♕d4+ ♔g8

½-½

In the view of this author, Rapport deserves an award for making chess more interesting and attractive with his style of play, approach to the game and outlook in interviews.

Rapport showed who he was with his decision in round seven in the game against Nepomniachtchi. Up to this point Rapport was on fifty percent, having drawn all the previous games.

In the Petrov, Rapport walked directly into Nepomniachtchi's preparation - a forced, sharp line, leading to a quick draw. It seemed that Rapport had no choice but to accept a quick draw following a repetition of moves, but - to the surprise of many - he decided to play on, despite the odds stacked against him. What occurred was a battle where Rapport had two rooks for a queen but his king was exposed. In a sharp and wild position white wasn't without chances, but, despite Rapport's heroic efforts, Nepomniachtchi made sure nothing came of them.

Richard **Rapport** - Ian **Nepomniachtchi**

FIDE Candidates 2022 Madrid ESP (7)

Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

It is said that fortune favours the brave, but in today's game between Rapport and Nepomniachtchi that wasn't the case.

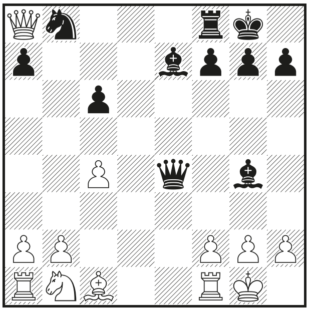
In their previous encounters, they drew eight times with one victory for Rapport. Following six hard-fought draws, this could have been a game where Rapport could have thrown the Candidates tournament wide open.

As in his round six game where he won, Nepomniachtchi responded with a Petrov.

An extremely sharp but forced line was played where Rapport walked straight into Nepomniachtchi's preparation.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♗d3 ♗d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4 c6 9.♕b3 ♗g4 10.♗xe4 dxe4 11.♘g5 ♗e7 12.♘xe4 ♕xd4 13.♕xb7 ♕xe4 14.♕xa8

White ended a rook up on move 14, but Black had serious mating threats.



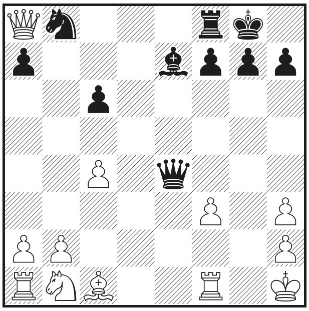
Here Rapport spent a lot of time thinking - to go for a draw by perpetual or to look for a way out.

14...♗h3 15.gxh3 ♕g6+ 16.♔h1 ♕e4+ 17.♔g1 ♕g6+ 18.♔h1 ♕e4+

Hand in head, Rapport was spending a lot of time thinking. His mood was noticeable from his facial expressions - from being very unhappy, almost angry with the position, to shuffling in his chair, looking around the hall, to staring at the board. After almost half an hour of thinking, he opted for:

19.f3

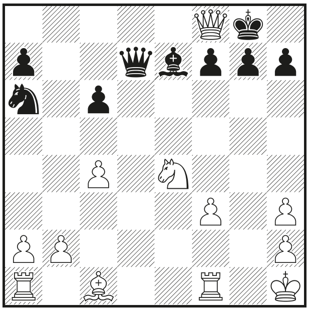
A big surprise. Opting for 19.f3 instead of 19.♔g1, meant entering a very complicated position where - according to the computer - White is weaker, despite being a rook up! Rapport showed he was meaning to fight. In the meantime, Nepomniachtchi was pacing up and down the hall.



After **19…♕d3 20.♔g2 ♕g6+ 21. ♔h1 ♕d3** Rapport turned down a draw again and entered directly a position in which he was - according to the computer - significantly worse.

22.♘d2 ♕d7 23.♘e4 ♘a6 24.♕xf8+

By move 24. White exchanged his queen for two rooks and we had the following position on the board:

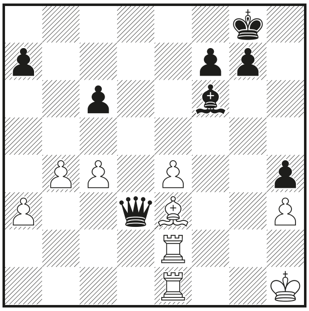


Despite the material equilibrium, White had a ruined pawn structure on the kingside with his king dangerously exposed. To make things even worse, Rapport did not make the most precise moves.

Nepomniachtchi, on the other hand, was playing fast - he brought in his knight from the edge of the left flank back into action on the kingside, advanced his h-pawn and started coordinating an attack. Rapport responded by advancing his queenside pawns and threatening Black's hanging a- and c- pawns.

Black executed his attack swiftly and sharply. Following the exchange of knights, he asserted complete dominance over the board.

24...♗xf8 25.♗f4 ♕xh3 26.♖ad1 h6 27.♗g3 ♘c5 28.♖fe1 ♘e6 29.a3 h5 30.♖d3 ♕f5 31.b4 h4 32.♗b8 ♘g5 33.♖de3 ♘xe4 34.fxe4 ♕f2 35.h3 ♗e7 36.♗h2 ♗g5 37.♗g1 ♕d2 38.♖3e2 ♕d3 39.♗e3 ♗f6



White was completely paralyzed. With 40.Bxa7 he gave up the last remaining pawn protecting his monarch and Black started weaving a mating net around the opponent's king while advancing his h-pawn towards promotion.

40.♗xa7 ♕xh3+ 41.♔g1 ♕g3+ 42.♔f1 h3 43.♗g1 ♗h4

0-1

After three hours of play, Rapport resigned. The victory left Nepomniachtchi as the sole leader with 5.5/7.

Despite the loss, Rapport deserves praise. Many chess pundits who were following the game said that Rapport's decision to decline an early draw and enter a weaker and riskier position instead was unnecessary and that he should have accepted reality. That may be objectively true, however, it is exactly those who refuse to accept (a dim) reality that stand a chance to make a difference, and sometimes manage to do it. Rapport has shown that he is here to fight whatever the odds and throw a good show for the audience, the people who love chess. From a wider perspective, chess was granted another interesting story to tell, which goes beyond the standard reciting of lines and is much more about psychology, courage and character. A rare exception to dull and quick theoretical draws which - however realistic - make the game less attractive for everyone.

In the end Rapport finished last, with 5.5. points. Rapport had ups and downs in this event and his place on the scoreboard is not a reflection of the play and strength he showed in the event.

THE CRUCIAL GAME OF THE CANDIDATES

Is it possible that the round seven game between Nepomniachthi and Rapport was crucial for the Candidates tournament? There are some reasons indicating that.

The only player who had most serious chances of catching up with Nepomniachtchi was Fabiano Caruana. After six rounds Nepomniachtchi was on 4.5 and Caruana was half a point behind.

During the round seven game where he played against Teimour Radjabov, Caruana got up and checked out the game between Rapport and Nepomniachtchi. He quickly recognised the line which was being played and knew that it is a draw and got back to his own game thinking - if I win today, I'll be sharing first place.

However, later on when he got up again he saw that Rapport was an hour down the clock and that he refused a draw and decided to play. The disbelief and, it seems, irritation were obvious on Caruana's face. As if he was thinking - here I am, trying to catch up with this guy and I'm so close, and you are giving him away easy presents like this one.

Caruana came back to the board where Rapport and Nepomniachtchi were playing once again, and as he walked away this time, he was shaking his head.

Caruana won his round seven game against Radjabov, but Nepomniachtchi's relatively effortless victory meant that he easily continued with his advantage over the rest. In the next round Caruana lost to Nakamura, while Nakamura lost in round nine to Radjabov. Everyone ended in a vicious circle save - Nepomniachtchi who just continued increasing his advantage.

THE UNLIKELY WINNER OF THIRD PLACE – TEIMOUR RADJABOV

As we wrote in the June issue of BCM - in the preview of the Candidates - Teimour Radjabov was a player with the least chance of winning in Madrid. The oldest (35) participant of the Candidates, he got to Madrid on a wild card, following controversies over his refusal to play in the previous cycle in Yekaterinburg over concerns regarding Covid-19.

Despite not playing in serious tournaments for a long time and not scoring a victory since 2019, Radjabov showed a great deal of vigour and resilience in Madrid. Starting slow and spending the first part of the event near rock bottom, he gradually made his way up - holding to a draw the favourites. In round nine he made his first victory, against none other than Hikaru Nakamura. This was his first victory in a classical game since 2nd October 2019 (in the World Cup against Ding Liren).

Teimour **Radjabov** - Hikaru **Nakamura**

FIDE Candidates 2022 Madrid ESP (9)

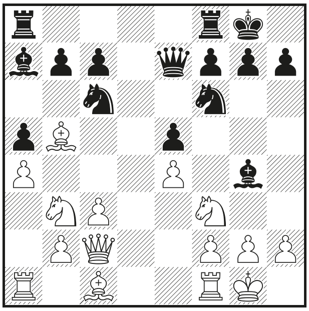
Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d5 7.♘bd2 dxe4 8.dxe4 a5 9.♕c2

In the Berlin Declined of the Ruy Lopez, Radjabov seemed to have ambushed Nakamura who was thinking for almost a quarter of an hour as early as move nine. On moves nine and ten Nakamura actually offered a repetition, which Radjabov declined.

9...♕e7 10.a4 ♘a7 11.♗e2 ♘c6 12.♘b3 ♗a7 13.♗b5 ♗g4

After 13.♗b5 Nakamura decided to sacrifice a pawn by 13…♗g4, trying his luck in the complications.



After Radjabov cooly grabbed the pawn - **14.♗xc6 ♗xf3 15.gxf3 bxc6 16.♘xa5** - Nakamura sank into a long reflection.

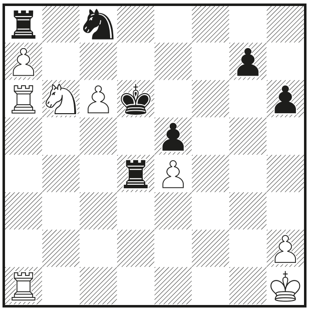
Indeed, White was clearly better: a pawn up, with better pawn structure and up on time. This was the second-best chance Radjabov had in all nine games he played up to that point in the tournament.

In the subsequent complications White traded some pieces, including the queens, returned an extra pawn but got a dominant position in the endgame thanks to his extremely dangerous a-passer.

Radjabov's pawns marched unopposed towards the eighth rank. Nakamura was looking for his chances, hoping to pull off a miracle, but it was to no avail.

16...♕e6 17.♕e2 ♘h5 18.b4 ♔h8 19.♔h1 h6 20.♖g1 f5 21.♖g2 fxe4 22.♕xe4 ♖f6 23.♗e3 ♗xe3 24.fxe3 ♕d5 25.♕g4 ♕xf3 26.♕xf3 ♖xf3 27.♖e2 c5 28.♘c6 cxb4 29.cxb4 ♖f6 30.b5 ♖d6 31.a5 ♘f6 32.a6 ♘d7 33.a7 ♔g8 34.♖c2 ♔f7 35.♘b4 c5 36.bxc6 ♘b6 37.e4 ♘c8 38.♖ca2 ♔e6 39.♖a6 ♖d4 40.♘d5 ♔d6 41.♘b6

In the following position Nakamura resigned as White's a7-pawn would cost Black a rook.



1-0

It was the player from Azerbaijan who in round 12 broke Ding Liren's wave and stopped him, by annihilating the Chinese player in 26 moves.

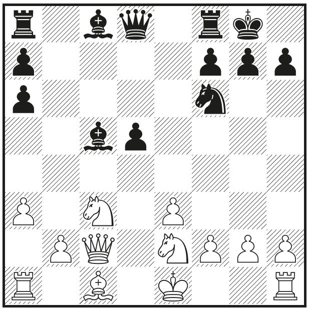
Ding Liren - Teimour **Radjabov**

FIDE Candidates Madrid ESP (12)

Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

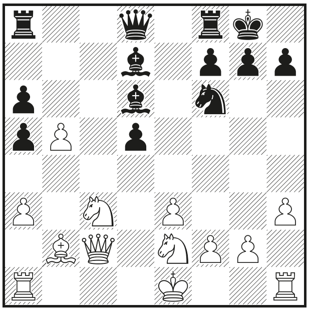
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♗d3 d5 6.cxd5 exd5 7.a3 ♗d6 8.♕c2 ♘a6 9.♘ge2 c5 10.♗xa6 bxa6
In the Nimzo-Indian, Radjabov ended with doubled pawns on the a-file and an isolated pawn on d5, but he retained a pair of bishops guaranteeing sufficient compensation. Ding, on the other hand, had a solid pawn structure and some prospects of putting pressure on Black's isolated d-pawn.

11.dxc5 ♗xc5



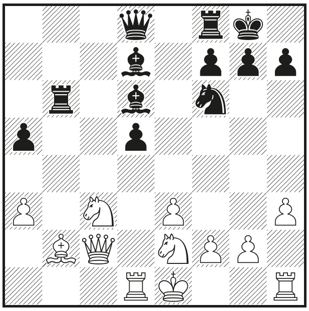
Here instead of castling Ding opted for a sharp and committal 12.b4?!, but Black immediately started complications on the queenside using his upper hand in development.

12.b4 ♗d6 13.♗b2 a5 14.b5 a6 15.h3 ♗d7



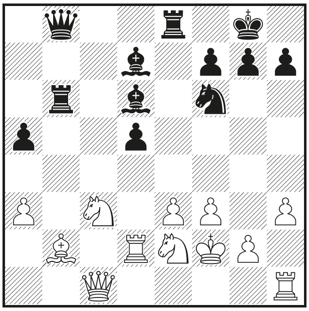
Radjabov pushed his doubled pawns on the a-file. Here, Ding should have played 16.a4 maintaining equality. Instead, he took on a6 and, after recapturing with the rook, Black got a slight edge thanks to more active pieces.

16.bxa6 ♖xa6 17.♖d1 ♖b6



Here Ding made a much more serious inaccuracy with 19.♖d2 (19.Ba1 and 19.0-0 were reasonable alternatives) and after 19...♕c8 20.f3 ♖e8 Radjabov's pressure was growing rampant.

18.♖d2 ♕c8 19.f3 ♖e8 20.♔f2 ♕b8 21.♕c1



White was in dire straits but 21.♕c1 was the last straw. Radjabov was spoilt for choice on how to win and he played the strongest 21...♖xe3! Ding continued with his resistance for a few more moves but it was futile - Black's whole army was just tearing White's position apart.

21...♖xe3 22.♘d1 ♖e8 23.♘e3 ♖b3 24.♘g4 ♗xg4 25.hxg4 ♖c8 26.♕a1 ♗f4

0-1

It was a shock not just for Ding Liren, but also for the audience: World No. 2, a 2800 player, completely lost in 21 moves with white(!) pieces. An appalling performance by Ding and a great result for Radjabov who has again shown he shouldn't be written off.

Teimour Radjabov - Ding Liren

Radjabov would go on to draw the round 13 game with Caruana and then defeat Richard Rapport in the last round of the tournament.

His final result is maybe the most surprising in the whole event: Radjabov was written off before and during the event. He never once reached the top three places and was never seen as anyone in contention for the top spots. Yet, he finished in shared third place, with 7.5/14. This could be a signal of a big comeback of a once revered chess player.

THE HESITANT JAN-KRZYSZTOF DUDA

The second-youngest participant of the Candidates, and the winner of the World Cup (which bought him a ticket for Madrid) Jan-Krzysztof Duda (24) seems to have struggled to let his energy and creativity roam free in the Candidates.

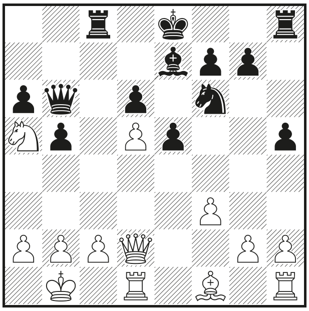
He was playing very solidly in the first part of the tournament, finding ways to hold his own and even turn the tables on his oponents, like in the following game.

Caruana was perhaps surprised by Duda's choice of the Najdorf and in the critical moment spent 20 minutes:

Fabiano **Caruana** - Jan-Krzysztof **Duda**

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.2)

Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic



The only way to pose some problems to Black and force him to demonstrate exact knowledge was the move 16.c4. However, after spending 20 minutes Caruana chose the harmless:

16.♘c6 After 16.c4!? bxc4 17.♘xc4 ♕a7! is the first correct step for Black, who will need to follow up with a few more to reach a satisfactory position.

After which the typical trick follows:

16...♘xd5! This move led to simplifications and equal endgame:

17.♘xe7 ♘xe7 18.♕xd6 ♕xd6 19.♖xd6 ♘c6 20.♖d2 ♔e7 Duda didn't have problems to hold the draw from this position. In fact, he was even pressing in the second half of the game, but the draw was inevitable.

½-½

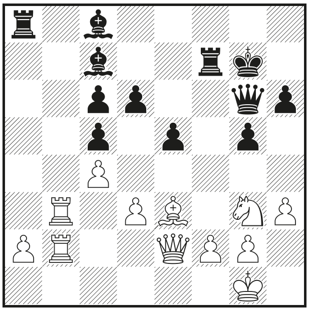
……

The game Duda-Ding Liren was also cut short at a critical junction. After long manoeuvring in yet another Giuoco Piano, the position opened up when Black pushed …f5. Then we arrived at the following position.

Jan-Krzysztof **Duda – Ding** Liren

FIDE Candidates Tournament (2.4)

Analysis and commentary by
GM Aleksandar Colovic



39.♘h5+ ♔g8 40.♘g3 Duda decided to repeat moves.

He could have continued the game with 40.g4 but Black has 40...e4! 41.dxe4 ♕xe4 42.♘g3 ♕g6 with a sharp position - Black's bishops can become dangerous if the position opens up after a move like ...d5, though for now that is not an option.

40...♔g7 41.♘h5+ 41.♖c3 was another option, to keep maneuvering. However, it's not easy to make progress against Black's well-entrenched position. One idea White has is ♖bb3-a3, to win the a-file and then advance with the a-pawn. 41...♗d8 42.♘h5+ ♔g8 43.g4 ♗e6 *(43...e4?* is now met by *44.♗d2!* as Black cannot take on d3 in view of *44...exd3 45.♕e8+ ♔h7 46.♕xd8* winning a piece.*)* 44.♖cb3! threatening ♖b8. 44...♗c7 45.♘g3 and the game goes on.

41...♔g8

½-½

……

Overall, Duda had five draws in the first five games. In all of them he mostly stood well and missed strong chances. However, his round six loss to Ian Nepomniachtchi seems to have impacted him strongly as afterwards he was struggling to recover, making just half a point in the following three games.

In most of his games Duda achieved a strong position but when it came to converting he started to shuffle and just lose momentum. However, he made a very important victory following a very tough game with Fabiano Caruana in round ten.

Playing as White, Duda opted for the Italian Game - an opening Caruana is considered to be a leading expert in. From early on Caruana was playing aggressively. He obviously thought that his best chances are against Duda who entered round ten as the only player without a victory in the tournament so far. Caruana was overly optimistic: he overstretched himself on the kingside, organising an attack on the white king, but - on the contrary - ended up creating more weaknesses in his own camp. As it turned out, not only was Duda's king secure but White ended up opening the g-file and he was the one attacking the (black) king. Caruana was in a significantly worse position and desperately in time trouble but this is where Duda stepped in. He couldn't find the right path to victory and allowed Caruana breathing space. Still, Black's position was so dire that even Duda's unprecise play did not help him to get away. In the end, Caruana had to come to terms with the inevitable and admit defeat.

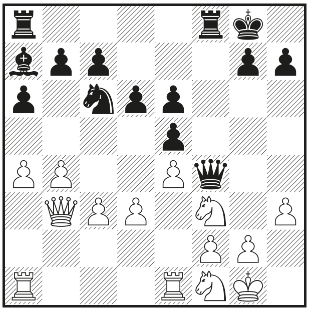
Jan-Krzysztof **Duda** - Fabiano **Caruana**

FIDE Candidates Madrid ESP (10.2)

Analysis and commentary by
Milan Dinic

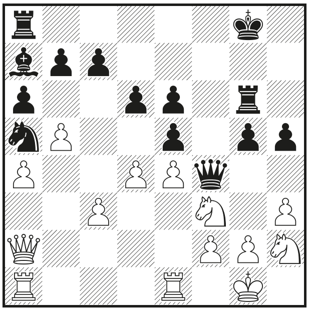
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 The Italian Game was played - an opening Caruana holds one of his PhDs on chess theory in.

4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 d6 6.0-0 a6 7.a4 ♗a7 8.♖e1 0-0 9.h3 ♗e6 10.♗xe6 fxe6 11.b4 ♘h5 12.♘bd2 ♘f4 13.♘f1 ♕f6 14.♗xf4 ♕xf4 15.♕b3



White was aiming to exert pressure on the queenside with b5. Black, on the other hand, somewhat optimistically played 15...♖f6 and launched an onslaught on the kingside. This move, however, was an ominous sign of things to come. It gave a significant advantage to White. Black seems to have overestimated his chances on the kingside, while at the same time underestimating White's pressure on the queenside. Caruana continued with his plan, with the g-pawn advanced, the queen leading the rook supporting the attack, while the a7-bishop was pinning the f2 pawn from a distance.

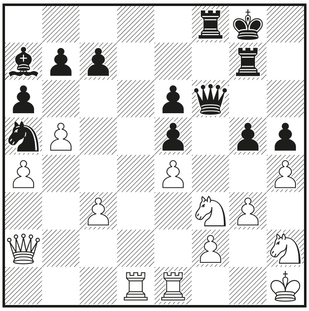
15...♖f6 16.b5 ♘a5 17.♕a2 g5 18.♘1h2 ♖g6 19.d4 h5



Caruana was very aggressive but he dangerously exposed himself with his minor pieces stuck on the queenside. Duda responded calmly and confidently -

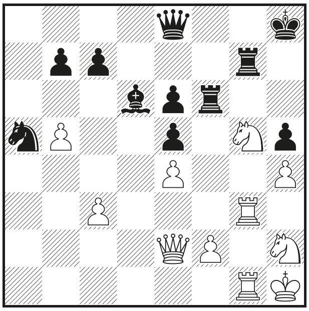
pushing away black’s queen and aiming to release the pawns to secure a stronghold for his knights on the kingside. There was one more factor - time. Caruana was spending it much faster than his opponent.

20.g3 ♕f6 21.♖ad1 ♖g7 22.♔h1 ♖f8 23.dxe5 dxe5 24.h4



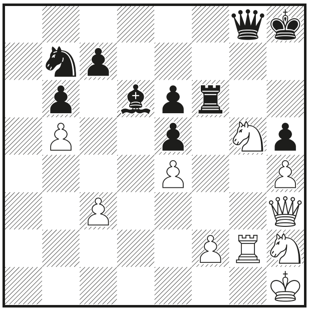
White now struck Black where he thought he was strongest - directly going for the clearing of the g-file and opening Caruana’s king for an attack down the same line. Black had weaknesses all over the board. Duda was now organising an attack on the black king - he aligned his rooks on the g-file and was dominating.

24...gxh4 25.gxh4 ♗c5 26.♖g1 ♗d6 27.♘g5 ♔h8 28.♕e2 ♕g6 29.♖d3 axb5 30.♖dg3 ♕e8 31.axb5 ♖f6



Here Duda made a mistake. Instead of ♖3g2 or c4, he played 32.♕f1, giving a chance to Caruana. In the following moves Duda started wavering, giving more opportunities to Black to ease the pressure, including allowing Caruana to bring his a5-knight to life.It was obvious that Duda wasn’t happy with the way he played after move 31. The good thing was that his position was so dominant that he had space for the errors he made.

32.♕f1 b6 33.♕g2 ♕f8 34.♕h3 ♕g8 35.♖1g2 ♘b7 36.♘h7 ♖fg6 37.♖xg6 ♖xg6 38.♘g5 ♖f6



After missing some good opportunities, Duda found the strongest one in this position, 39.f4! Caruana quickly played 39...♘c5 and after 40.fxe5 ♗xe5 41.♘f3! survived the first time control, but he was now a piece down. Like in the game against Nakamura, Caruana continued to fight despite being in a lost position. As the saying goes, you can’t save a game you resigned. Duda’s conversion was not optimal, but Black’s position was so hopeless that nothing helped. After a fierce and long battle, Caruana had to give up. A devastating blow to his ambitions in the tournament and the first victory for Duda.

39.f4 ♘c5 40.fxe5 ♗xe5 41.♘gf3 ♕a8 42.♘xe5 ♘xe4 43.♘hf3 ♕a1+ 44.♔h2 ♕c1 45.♘d3 ♕xc3 46.♖a2 ♘f2 47.♖xf2 ♕xd3 48.♕g3 ♕d6 49.♕xd6 cxd6 50.♔g3 ♖f5 51.♖d2 ♖xb5 52.♖xd6 ♔g7 53.♖xe6 ♖b4 54.♖e5 ♔h6 55.♖d5 ♖b1 56.♘d4 ♖g1+ 57.♔f4

1-0

But Duda was struggling to get his momentum and his problems with converting showed also in the round 12 game against Firouzja where the Frenchman overstretched himself and played too optimistically. In a sharp line of the Semi-Slav Firouzja again - like in some previous games - started outplaying himself by weakening his castle and launching his pawns on a goose chase on move 22. Duda responded with an energetic f-pawn push and grabbed the initiative. However, as in some other previous games in his case, he just couldn't find the right moves in several critical moments and dropped the advantage.

In round 13 he was defeated by Hikaru Nakamura, despite having a better position in the first part of the game. It was just obvious that he wasn't feeling comfortable. Finally, in the last round, we saw a relaxed Duda who played well against Nepomniachtchi and drew.

The 24-year-old Jan-Krzysztof Duda finished the tournament on 5.5/14, in shared seventh-eighth place. In his first appearance in the Candidates, Duda showed a strong fighting spirit and ability to put the more experienced players in an uncomfortable position. However, he probably needs to work more on his confidence and willpower.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The focus is now turning to the 2023 match for the title of world champion. The place isn't yet known but - at the time of writing this article (4th July), neither is the participation of the current world champion.

From the messages Magnus Calsen's team has been sending during the Madrid tournament, it seemed highly likely that the Norwegian will not defend his title. Still…

THE MADRID MEETING BETWEEN FIDE AND CARLSEN

One evening, as the tournament was drawing to a close, FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich and Director-General Emil Sutovsky sat down with Carlsen to discuss the 2023 match.

In an interview to chess.com Sutovsky said that both sides are 'looking for ways to have him [Carlsen] stay in the championship cycle… We still have time to decide and finalise the rules for the match. Magnus was reasonable with his ideas. I can say that we have started discussing what could be done to implement Magnus' ideas. At the same time we don't have time to carry on with something and not know who will be playing. That's why we agreed to intensify talking to Magnus.'

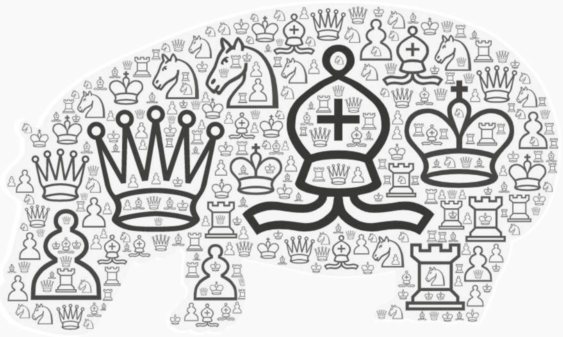
The decision on the format will be within two to three weeks time, said Sutovsky.

'We would not be happy if Magnus skips it. It's not the end of the world but he is not just a world champion but a dominant world champion. We don't want him to skip the cycle. At the same time we don't believe that the world champion can say it will be this way or I don't play. So, we have to find the balance.'

'There isn't a formal deadline for Carlsen, by July 20 we're hoping to have a decision', said the FIDE Director-general.

FIDE Candidates 2022 FINAL STANDINGS

Rk	Name	Pt	Rtg
1	**Nepomniachtchi Ian**	9,5/14	2766
2	**Ding Liren**	8,0/14	2806
3	**Radjabov Teimour**	7,5/14	2753
4	**Nakamura Hikaru**	7,5/14	2760
5	**Caruana Fabiano**	6,5/14	2783
6	**Firouzja Alireza**	6,0/14	2793
7	**Duda Jan-Krzysztof**	5,5/14	2750
8	**Rapport Richard**	5,5/14	2764



BEHOLD NOW BEHEMOTH! BOOK OF JOB (40:15-24)

By Grandmaster Raymond Keene OBE

In the French version of the Old Testament we read, as the equivalent of the eponymous title of this month's column: *voici l'hippopotame*. Voici indeed!

I have just received a review copy of **The Hippopotamus Defence** by Italian IM Alessio de Santis, **published by New in Chess.** The Hippo was first promulgated in detail by the English amateur JC Thompson (who, surprisingly, receives no credit in the new book), widely regarded as an eccentric, but who has turned out to be something of a prophet. Sadly, as Jesus Christ pointed out, 'verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.'

As it is, the prophet was right and the Behemoth has maintained a solid fifty percent for Black, even at the highest level of competition, and in one world championship match (Petrosian v Spassky 1966).

Alexander Tolush (1910-1969) was a strong Soviet Grandmaster. He played in the USSR Championship ten times, taking 2nd place behind Paul Keres, in 1950. In 1953, he took 1st place at Bucharest, ahead of Petrosian, Smyslov, and Spassky.

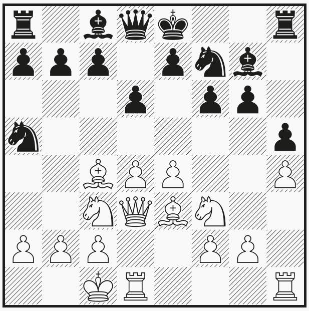
According to Bill Cash's invaluable online information about the origins of the Hippo, the following year Tolush gave a simultaneous exhibition in England. One of the players was our eccentric prophet, John Crittenden Thompson (1889-1971) of Newcastle. Thompson liked unusual openings. His iconoclastic brainchild was 1. e4 ♘h6 (or 1. d4 g6 2. e4 ♘h6), which he called the Hippopotamus Defence. In 1957 he wrote a short pamphlet, entitled *Hippopotamus Chess Opening*. He used this opening when he confronted masters and grandmasters during simultaneous exhibitions, defeating grandmasters Tolush in 1954 and Janosevic in 1956 (but losing to Keres) with this strange defence. Thompson first called his opening (...♘h6 as Black and Nh3 as White), the Chinese Opening, but rejected it in favour of the hippo. In his eyes, the pawn structure resembled a sleeping hippo.

Here is how Thompson defeated Tolush , using the old hippo defence in a simul. It's a wild game with chances for both sides. Thompson finally found a way to attack White's king, threatening mate in the middle of the board.

Alexander Kazimirovich **Tolush** -
John Crittenden **Thompson**

Simul London ENG, 13.01.1954

1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♘h6 3.♘c3 f6 4.♗c4 ♘f7 5.♘f3 ♗g7 6.h4 h5 7.♕d3 d6 8.♗e3 ♘c6 9.0-0-0 ♘a5



which eventually led to this situation:

10.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 11.♘d2 ♗d7 12.f4 ♗g4 13.♘f3 ♕d7 14.e5 d5 15.♖de1 ♖he8 16.♘d2 b6 17.♖hf1 ♗f5 18.♕a6 c6 19.♘e2 ♕c7 20.♘g3 ♗c8 21.♕d3 f5 22.♘f3 ♘c4 23.♘g5+ ♔g8 24.e6 ♘d6 25.♕e2 a5 26.♘xh5 ♗a6 27.♕d1 ♗xf1 28.♖xf1 ♖f8 29.♘g3 ♘c4 30.♗g1 ♕d6 31.h5 ♕b4 32.♕d3 ♘xb2 33.♕f3 ♘c4 34.♕d3 ♘b2 35.♕b3 ♘c4 36.♕d3 c5 37.hxg6 ♕b2+ 38.♔d1 cxd4 39.♘xf5 ♖xf5 40.♕xf5 ♖f8 41.♘f7 ♘e3+ 42.♗xe3 dxe3 43.♔e2 d4 44.♖h1 ♕c3 45.♕d3 ♕c6 46.♖g1 ♕xe6 47.g4 ♕xa2 48.f5 Thompson finished off as follows:

48...♖c8 49.♖c1 ♕d5 50.♖g1 ♖c3 51.♕a6 ♖xc2+ 52.♔d1 ♖d2+ 53.♔e1 ♕c5 and the Soviet Grandmaster resigned

0-1

The Hippopotamus Defence is just what players need who loathe memorising reams of opening theory.

It's a straightforward and clear-cut defence that avoids the ever-growing body of mainline analysis. It's flexible and universal: Black can use the Hippo against virtually all of White's choices (1. e4, 1. d4, 1. c4, 1. f4, the Colle, London, Trompowsky, Réti and others). It's relatively unknown and will surprise many opponents. It has been employed by Tony Miles and Boris Spassky amongst others and, as will be seen, I have come very close to using it myself.

On top of all that, the Hippo is seriously underestimated: with its characteristic double fianchetto it may look quiet, but inside there lurks a very dangerous animal. FIDE Master Alessio de Santis is one of the world's greatest experts on the Hippo and has written a practical, well-structured and accessible manual. I strongly recommend it and I thoroughly concur with the verdict of British Grandmaster Glenn Flear:

'This work was little short of a revelation. In advance of opening it up I was expecting something superficial, but once I delved into those murky waters where Hippos dwell, I was impressed by De Santis's application. Just about all plausible structures that White may try are anticipated, examined and, consequently, appropriate antidotes are advised. De Santis really has come at his subject from all conceivable angles to leave no stone unturned. Did you know that the hippopotamus is the most dangerous of all large animals? In chess opening terms, I would argue that it's also the case.'

The King James Bible also concurs, attributing these characteristics to Behemoth: 'He moveth his tail like a cedar, the sinews of his stones are wrapped together. His bones are as strong as pieces of brass; his bones are like iron.'

I have unwittingly tried the Hippo myself, though de Santis would doubtless describe my efforts as a Semi-Hippopotamus. The win in this game was instrumental in helping me to gain the gold medal prize on my board, representing England.

Slavoljub **Marjanovic** - Raymond **Keene**

EUR-chT (Men) 7th Skara SWE (5), 24.01.1980

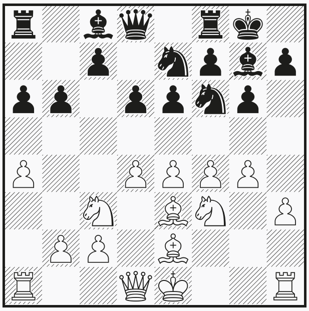
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 Strangely, De Santis now mentions a variety of fourth move alternatives for Black, but completely omits any commentary on 4...♘c6 which I proceeded to play:

4...♘c6 5.♗e3 ♘f6 6.♘f3 Fischer's 6h3, planning g4, leads to wild complications. White tries to punch Black out, but Black has resources, as I proved against the Icelandic Grandmaster Jon Arnason, in the 1981 Lloyds Bank Masters, where that win also helped me to win the gold medal.

6...0-0 7.♗e2 a6 Distinguished journalist Leonard Barden wrote: ’The ’English recipe’ which Miles played on move one against Karpov.’ Here part of the idea is to induce a weakness if White later castles long. A ghost of that theme can be identified in the Thompson extract above.

8.a4 e6 9.h3 ♘e7! Barden describes this sideways regrouping as: ‘An interesting Nimzowitsch-type idea, prophylactic against e4-e5.’ It also means that we are now entering the territory of the Behemoth.

10.g4 b6



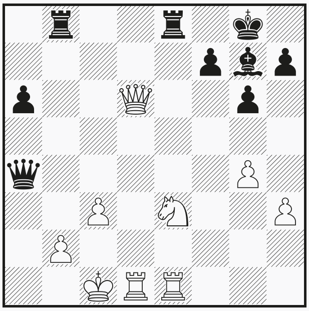
We have now reached what de Santis describes as a semi-Hippopotamus

11.♘d2 c5 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.♘c4 d5!! Finely judged: Black temporarily gambits two pawns but opens up the centre, when the white king has nowhere safe to go.

14.♗xc5 ♘d7 Not 14... dxc4?? 15.♕xd8 ♖xd8 16.♗xe7 Now the Yugoslav Grandmaster has no choice but to accept Black’s sacrifices.

15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 The following sequence is forced.

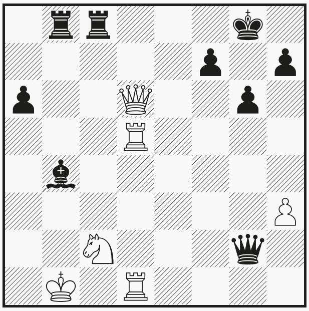
16.exd5 ♗b7 17.♕d2 exd5 18.♘xd5 ♕e4 19.0-0-0 ♗xd5 20.♕xd5 ♕xe2 21.♖he1 ♕f2 22.♕xd7 ♕xf4+ 23.♘e3 ♖ab8 24.c3 ♖fe8 25.♕d6 ♕xa4



All in accordance with Black’s 7th. White has defended ingeniously against material disaster but his queenside is now open to attack.

26.♘c2 ♖ec8 27.g5 Preventing... ♗h6+ but White’s stopgap measures, hiding his blight under a bushel, merely postpone defeat.

27...♕b5 28.b4 ♕xg5+ 29.♔b1 ♗xc3 30.♖d5 ♕g2 31.♖ed1 ♗xb4!



Fittingly, the dark-squared bishop delivers the death blow, which completes the demolition job.

32.♘xb4 ♕c2+ 33.♔a1 ♕c3+ 34.♔a2 ♖xb4

0-1

‘The Silicon Road to Chess Improvement’ by M.G. Sadler

Every competitive player can improve their game employing Sadler’s ideas and plans

By James Pratt

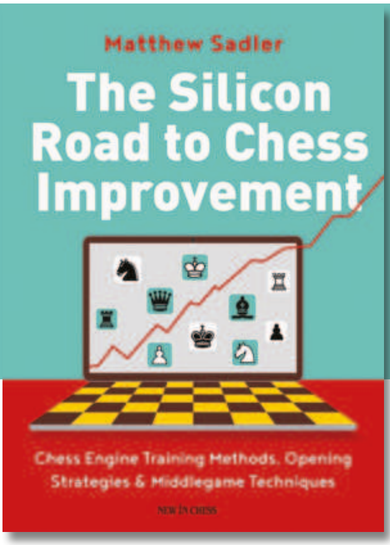
Subtitled *Chess Engine Training Methods, Opening Strategies & Middlegame Techniques,* this is the author’s eighth book. Matthew Sadler is a former British Under 11 Champion (1984) and Joint British Champion (1997). More recently his broadcasts, often being joined by WIM Natasha Regan, his co-author of the ground-breaking bestseller ‘Game Changer’ (NIC 2019), have drawn great praise. Your reviewer watches him on *YouTube*, a great boon during lockdown, of course, and occasionally comments and sends in questions. The duo is – let me assure you - patience itself, born teachers.

Every competitive player, given the time and the obvious determination, can improve their game employing Sadler’s ideas and plans. This is the central theme of Matthew Sadler's thought-provoking new book, an impressive text based on many years of experience (he started young) with the world's best computers as a leading grandmaster, albeit now retired from active play.

We meet Stockfish Classical, NNUE, *Leela Zero*, ‘AllieStein’, Ethereal, the wonderfully labelled Stoofvlees, and so many others. By the way, *Leela Zero* is also shown playing Chess960, Chapter 12 shows the author’s characteristic modesty (‘ … also doubtful whether I would have been bold or imaginative enough to even consider any of these sacrifices!’ and later ‘I think it was around here I started to get an inkling of what Stockfish was up to.’ Of course, Sadler sees to the depths. His comment ‘having played through this game I am still unsure which variants are losing and which are drawing ...’ again draws more than a smile, not that the author is without humour or warmth, surely rare indeed in a player so strong?).

The author presents some unique methods to improve your game using your engine. You may not be able to fathom their depth of calculation, but there is so much more your engine can do for you other than just seeing where you may have gone wrong: mistakes that, being human, we might otherwise be repeating again and again.

The grandmaster author explains how in your opening preparation, instead of sifting through masses of analysis, often trying to memorise strings of complex and often irrelevant moves, you should actually play training games against your computer (Botvinnik would have had a field day!). He also guides your early middlegame play, the conversion of advantages, your


Matthew Sadler
The Silicon Road to Chess Improvement
Chess Engine Training Methods, Opening Strategies & Middlegame Techniques
NEW IN CHESS

'The Silicon Road to Chess Improvement' by M.G. Sadler, (New in Chess 2021). 560pp, symbols explained, figurine algebraic, bibliography. 22 chapters, 121 complete games including 8 by the World Champion. Index of Names, Engines, Openings, Middlegame and also opening themes. Available as a Kindle. 34-page sampler available as a PDF supplement.

Prices vary, so go to *www.newinchess.com*.

positional play and defensive skills. In short – you'll be in good company – we learn (hopefully) how to dissect and scrutinise our own games. He stops short of adding: 'Don't throw those old scoresheets away', so *we* mention it right here!

Sadler explains how the top engines tackle crucial middlegame themes such as entrenched pieces (shades of Barden's 'Steinitz Knight'), whole board play, attacking rhythm (a new one on me), when to exchange pieces, the march of the rook's pawn (deepest Larsen country!) and queen in combat with various pieces. He also opens your eyes to typical strategies that our Silicon friends have unearthed and fine-tuned in popular defences such as the King's Indian, Grünfeld, Slav, French (he likes the Burn and Rubinstein; see Chapter 10 where my beloved French is contrasted with, of all things, the ubiquitous London System) and, of course, the Sicilian, even dealing with the 2.b2-b4 Wing Gambit (shameless!).
He illustrates his lessons with a collection of fantastic games, not all recent - there are six by a certain Bobby Fischer - and all explained with his trademark enthusiasm, hundreds of diagrams, technical notes and reference to books and tablebase. Matthew's involvement appears total. His accuracy surely that of a world-class surgeon. He is honest and sincere.

Any faults? Well, he misses calling 1.e4 g6 2.d4 d6 3.♘c3 c6 4. f4 d5 the Gurgenidze, a line I saw first in a Keene/ Botterill Batsford about 50 years ago! And I did not spot any uses of Rabars.

Some years back, Sadler's Everyman book on the Queen's Gambit Declined won the BCF Book of the Year. Can we expect this fascinating, massive book to be similarly honoured? I leave you with one more glorious quote 'Alpha-Zero famously played 44 million lightning-fast games against itself in 8 hours to reach superhuman strength!' Ah, so that's what I have omitted to do after all these years. So, if you'll excuse me …

The author is an English Grandmaster.

THE BRITISH CHESS PROBLEM SOCIETY
Founded 1918
Affiliated to the English Chess Federation
Member of the World Federation for Chess Composition

WINTON BRITISH CHESS SOLVING CHAMPIONSHIP 2022-2023
(Organised by the British Chess Problem Society)

To All Chess Editors

The starter problem is below. I would be obliged if you would announce this competition sponsored by Winton at the next available opportunity and invite your readers to enter by solving the starter problem. White, playing up the board, is to play and force mate in two moves against any Black defence. There is no entry fee, and the competition is open to British residents only. Competitors need only send White's first move, known as the key move. Entries can be made in one of two ways:

1. By post to Nigel Dennis, Boundary House, 230 Greys Road,
   Henley-on-Thames, Oxon RG9 1QY
2. By email to winton@theproblemist.org

All entries must be postmarked or emailed no later than 31st July 2022 and must give the entrant's name and home address. Juniors under the age of 18 on 31st August 2021 must give their date of birth.

Please ask your readers to mention in their entries that they saw the starter problem in your publication, as this will give you a chance of winning the traditional editors competition with prize fund £100, £80, £60, £40 and £20 for encouraging most entries. Receipt of the solution to the starter will only be acknowledged after the closing date, when all competitors will receive the answer, and those who get it right will also receive the postal round, which will contain 8 more difficult and varied problems. In due course the best competitors and the best juniors from the postal round will be invited to the final in February 2023. The exact date and location will be advised. There will be prize money in the final for the most successful solvers and the ultimate winner of the final will win the right to represent Great Britain at the World Chess Solving Championships 2023.

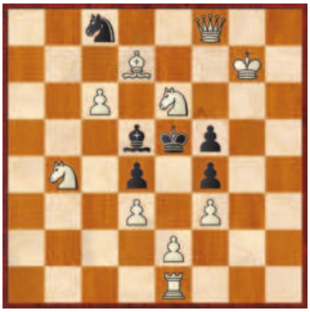
To find out more about the BCPS and to follow the course of the competition see:

http://www.theproblemist.org/wcbcsc/wcbcsc.pl?type=home

Members £25 for paper magazines subscription, £5 for pdf only.

Nigel Dennis 30th May 2022
Controller
Winton British Chess Solving Championship

WBCSC Starter 2022-2023
Black (6 Men)



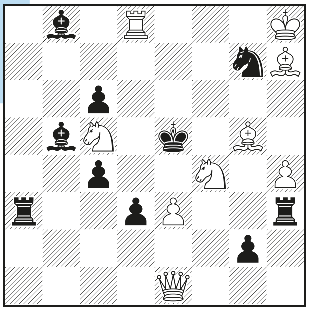
White (10 Men)
White to play and mate in two moves

PROBLEM WORLD

by Christopher Jones
cjajones1@yahoo.co.uk
Grandmaster of Chess Composition

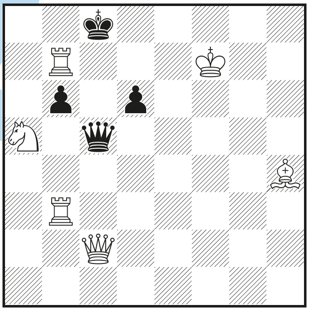
Solutions are given on page 446

1



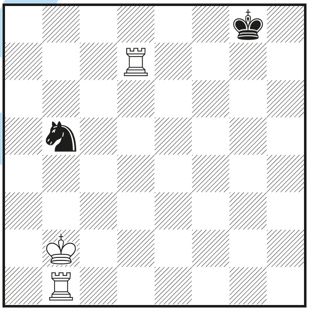
David Shire (Canterbury)
Mate in 2
ORIGINAL

2



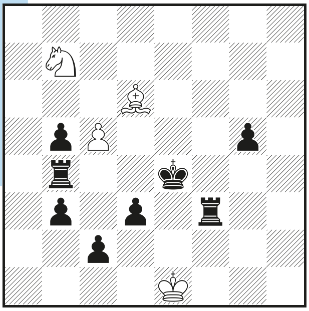
Michael Lipton (Brighton)
Mate in 2 (b) Rb3>b4
ORIGINAL

3



Michael Lipton (Brighton)
Mate in 3
ORIGINAL

4



Christer Jonsson (Sweden)
Helpmate in 3 - 2 solutions
ORIGINAL

QUOTES AND QUERIES

THE LESSER-KNOWN GAMES OF JOSEPH HENRY BLACKBURNE

By Alan Smith

6219 Joseph Henry Blackburne was the second champion of the British Chess Association. In a career spanning over 50 years he met and defeated the leading players of the era. There have been three collections of Blackburne's games, by Anderson Graham, Owen Hindle and Tim Harding.

Here are some games that, to the best of my knowledge, were not included in any of these volumes. The first two games feature the Urusov Gambit. This was a new idea at the time, so the players were on their own.

Joseph Henry **Blackburne - la Fontaine**

Manchester CC 1862

1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.♘f3 c5? Black should be happy transposing to a two knights with 4...♘c6 accepting the gambit with 4...♘xe4 5.♕xd4 ♘f6 is a riskier path. Both Steinitz and Lasker lost miniature games trying to defend black's position.

5.c3 dxc3 5...♘xe4 6.♕b3 ♘d6 was worth a try.

6.♘xc3 ♗e7 7.0–0 7.e5 is even stronger.

7...0–0 8.e5 ♘e8 9.♘e4 b6 Black had to play 9...d6.

10.♘fg5 h6 11.♘xf7 ♖xf7 12.♕d5 Black cannot reinforce f7 so he is quite lost.

12...♘c7 13.♕xf7+ ♔h8 14.♗xh6 gxh6 15.♘f6 ...1–0 Black must surrender his queen to prevent mate.

Norfolk News, 18th October 1862

la Fontaine - J.H. **Blackburne**

Manchester CC 1862

1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗c5 5.e5 d5 6.exf6 dxc4 7.fxg7 ♖g8 8.♗g5 ♕d6 9.♕e2+ ♗e6 10.♘c3 dxc3 11.♖d1 cxb2 12.0–0 12.♖xd6 b1=♕+ 13.♖d1 ♕b4+.

12...b1=♕ 13.♖xb1 13.♖xd6 ♕xf1+ 14.♔xf1 cxd6.

13...♘d7 14.♖fd1 14.♖xb7 ♖xg7.

14...♕a6 15.♘e5 ♗d6 16.♘xf7 ♔xf7 17.♕h5+ ♔xg7 18.♕h6+ ♔f7 19.♕xh7+ ♖g7 20.♕h5+ ♔g8 21.♖d4 ♗f7 22.♕h4 ♖h7 23.♕g4 ♗xh2+ 24.♔h1 ♘e5 25.♕f5 ♗g6

0–1

Norfolk News, 7th March 1863

J. **Cooke** - J.H. **Blackburne**

Bristol 1871

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 f5 3.♘xe5 ♘f6 4.♗c4 fxe4 5.♘f7 ♕e7 6.♘xh8 d5 7.♗xd5? 7.♗e2 is correct, but black got reasonable play with 7...♘c6 8.d4 exd4 9.cxd4 ♗g4 10.♘c3 0-0-0 11.0-0 ♗e6 Gamman - Blackburne London 1869.

7...♗g4 8.f3 exf3 9.♔f2 ♕c5+ 9...fxg2? loses to 10.♖e1 ♗xd1 11.♖xe7+ ♗xe7 12.♗xb7.

10.d4 ♕xd5 11.♖e1+ ♗e7 12.♘c3 ♕d6 13.g3 ♘c6 14.♘b5 ♕d7 15.♗f4 ♘d5

16.♕d2 a6 17.♘xc7+ ♗xc7 18.♗xc7 ♕xc7 19.♕g5 Looking for counterplay.

19...♕d7 20.d5 0–0–0 21.♖xe7 21.dxc6 loses to 21...♕d4+! 22.♕e3 ♗c5!

21...♘xe7 22.♘f7 h6 23.♕f4 ♘xd5 24.♕c4+ ♘c7 25.♘d6+ 25.♘xd8? ♕d2+

25...♔b8 26.♖d1 ♕e6 27.♕xe6 ♗xe6 28.♖d3 ♘c5

0–1

Bristol Daily Post, 23rd November 1871

This game was included in a report of a simultaneous display, but the loser was not included in the list of Blackburne's opponents, so it was probably a skittle.

J.H. **Blackburne** - Alexander **Steinkuhler**

Manchester CC 1874

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♘e5 0–0 6.g3 b6 7.♗g2 ♗b7 8.0–0 White's proto Catalan has transposed into a Queen's Indian.

8...♘e8 8...♘bd7 9.cxd5 ♘xe5? 10.d6! ♗xg2 11.dxe7 ♕xe7 12.dxe5 ♗xf1 13.exf6 ♕xf6 14.♕xf1 and the two minor pieces proved stronger than black's rook, Bogoljubow - Nimzowitsch Karlsbad 1923.

9.b3 f6 10.♘d3 c6 11.♘f4 11.cxd5 is better.

11... ♘c7 12.♕c2 He needed to play 12.cxd5 first.

12...e5 13.dxe5 fxe5 14.♘h3 ♘ba6 15.♖d1 ♕c8 16.cxd5 16.♘g5 mixes it up.

16...♘b4 17.♕d2 cxd5 18.a3 d4! 19.axb4 19.♘e4 is better.

19...♗xg2 20.♔xg2 ♕b7+ 21.f3 ♗xb4! 22.♘g5 ♗xc3 23.♕d3 e4! 24.♕c4+ ♔h8 25.♗a3? White gets his piece back after 25.♘f7+ ♖xf7 26.♕xf7 ♗xa1 27.♗f4 ♗c3 but black has the better endgame.

25...♘d5! 26.♔g1 ♖fc8 27.♕b5 a6 28.♕a4 b5 29. 0–1

Liverpool Weekly Albion 17th, January 1874

This is the best of Steinkuhler's wins against Blackburne that have survived. He also defeated Amos Burn twice in Manchester - Liverpool matches, as well as beating Steinitz, Horwitz and Robey in offhand games. He conducted a good chess column in *Manchester Weekly Times* during 1873.

John **Jenkin** - J.H. **Blackburne**

Purssell's 1880

1.b4 a5 2.b5 2.bxa5 c6.

2...c6 3.a4 e5 4.♗b2 d6 5.e3 f5 6.f4 This is not bad, but 6.d4 is more forceful.

6...e4 7.♗e2 ♘f6 8.♘h3 ♗e7 9.0–0 0–0 10.♘f2 ♕e8 11.g4 A bit premature, 11.♔h1 is better.

11...fxg4 12.♔h1 h5 13.♖g1 d5 14.h3 ♕g6 15.d3? He should have tried 15.hxg4 hxg4 16.♗xg4

15...♗c5! 16.dxe4 bxe3 17.e5 ♘e4 18.♘xe4 ♕xe4+ 19.♗f3 gxf3 20.e6 f2+ 21.♖g2 ♗xe6 22.♘xd2 ♗xd2 23.♕xh5 d4 24.

0–1

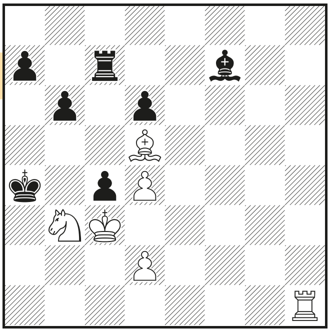
Glasgow Weekly Herald, 30th October 1880

Jenkin was the leading Scottish player of his age. He conducted the chess column of *Glasgow Weekly Herald* from 1872 until 1882. He won first prize at Birmingham 1877 after a tie with Rev William Wayte.

Endgame Studies

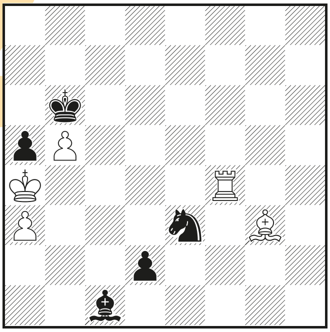
by Ian Watson
ian@irwatson.uk

1



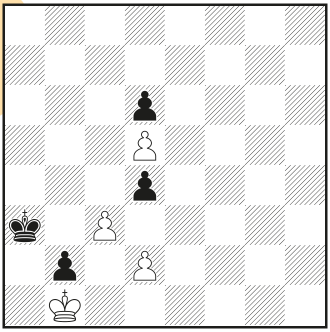
V Hergert & M Minski
ISC 2022
WIN

2



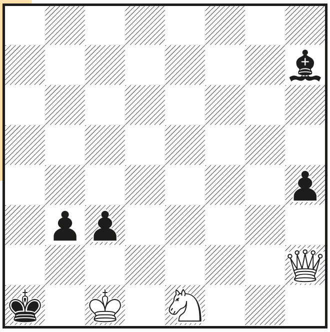
G Nadareishvili
Revista de Sah 1973
DRAW

3



J Nunn
Daily Telegraph 1994
WIN

4



P Keres
Magyar Sakkvilag 1936 (version)
WIN

Study-solving online

Online study-solving tourneys have arrived! You've been able to do online solving for some time, but the tourneys have contained a lot of problems and only a few studies. Now there are the first studies-only tourneys. The first two are ready on the netchex.club site. There's a Category 1 and a Category 2 tourney; the Cat.2 is somewhat easier. Both tourneys contain four studies, and both are against the clock, with 90 minutes to solve the four studies. You can set up the positions on a board and move the pieces to help you. When you've found the solution, you enter it on the screen.

Before starting, you'll need to get familiar with the netchex software. For example, you have to click on the piece you want to move and then click on its destination square. That makes the move happen on the screen board and it makes your chosen move appear in the solution box. You could try a couple of the Daily Challenges on the netchex.club home page and then one of the studies in the Open-style Practice Tourneys, such as the study in the Student/Cat.2. When you do one of the study tourneys themselves, you enter your solutions to all the four studies, then go to the score page to see your result.

The scoring system is the same as for the four studies in this month's column. You can, however, only enter one line - you can't enter alternatives - so you have to decide on each move what is the composer's intention.

Please e-mail me your comments and suggestions for improvements. If we get enough interest, we'll be making new tourneys regularly. The site www.netchex.club is designed and built by Brian Cook, who also selects the studies. He gets me to test-solve them, so if you find any mistakes in them, that's largely down to me!

While on the subject of mistakes, I'll take the blame too for an error in the April issue of BCM. The fourth study, by Halberstadt, was wrongly labelled as 'Draw' instead of 'Win'. Hopefully, readers realised that it was a win study. My thanks to Elliot Ainley for e-mailing me about it.

This month's four studies are not from the new study-solving tourneys, but instead were used in online solving tourneys of the traditional sort, meaning in tourneys with a mix of problem types. The first two are from the ISC (International Solving Contest) earlier this year. The second two are from the BOOM Jubilee tournament in June. All four are from the Cat.2 tourneys.

Just to remind you of the usual solving procedures: you'll need to set up these positions on a board. In solving events, you can use a chess set and you can move the pieces to try and help you solve. You solve against the clock; for these four studies give yourself an average of 25 minutes for each one, so 100 minutes in total. Points are awarded according to how much of the composer's solution you find, with five points available for each study if you find it all. In the answers, I'll show you where the points were awarded. You need to find the composer's main line; you can also write down sidelines if you're not sure what the main line is, but only the main line moves earn points. So, look for the most artistic, elegant line.

The solutions are on page 447.

Openings for Amateurs

by Pete Tamburro; ptamburro@aol.com

COMPETING THEMES IN THE RUY LOPEZ

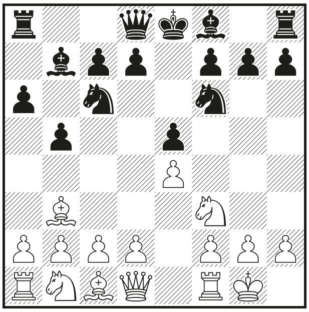
THE ROAD TO CHESS IMPROVEMENT IS NOT BUYING A NEW SPECIALIST OPENING BOOK. RATHER, IT'S DOING THE WORK OF UNDERSTANDING WHY THE MOVES ARE PLAYED IN THE OPENING AND WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO IN THE MIDDLE GAME AND EVEN, AT TIMES, THE ENDGAME

GM Jonathan Penrose, OBE, ten-time British Champion, who left us last year with an immortal legacy, played games of such creativity and interest to players of all levels. When you play over his games, it's as if he is giving you a chess lesson. One game I had chosen over 20 years ago for my book, Learn Chess From the Greats, had always filled me with admiration. What a tense struggle! You learnt a lesson in one of the critical lines in the Ruy Lopez. I have no idea what book I found it in, but I'm glad I did. Enjoy the fight!

Jonathan **Penrose** – Borislav **Vukcevic**

10th Correspondence Olympiad Amsterdam

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♗b3 ♗b7



It is at this point that we need to stop and look at the big picture. Black, by putting his bishop on b7 with a determination to put the other cleric on c5, is contesting the centre squares on d4, d5 and e4 - either directly or indirectly. This is very different from the normal closed variation of the standard Ruy Lopez main line. Black also has his pawns out there on b5 and a6 as targets on the queenside and is allowing White to play ♗g5 at some point to emphasise the absence of Black's king bishop on e7.

White, on the other hand, is in a typical Spanish set-up and must decide how to approach this defensive formation. There are two different plans. One is to go with d3 and slowly but surely build up with c3, similar to the slower form of the Italian game. The alternative is to go with d4 in one move, after properly preparing it. One bonus is that White doesn't have to play h3 to keep the black bishop off g4. Neither side can be cavalier about the position. There is much work ahead.

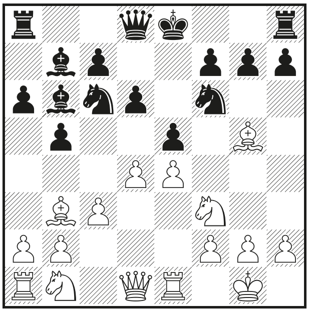
7.♖e1 Penrose is going to choose the d4 plan. A possible continuation for the d3 plan would be 7.d3 ♗c5 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.♘d5 ♕d8 12.c3 d6± and now 13.d4. I couldn't help but be reminded of the similarity of this line with the Canal Variation of the Italian Game. There are key differences, of course - among them Black's not going after the ♗b3 with the knight. The exchange of bishop for knight on f6 and then ♘d5 chasing the queen back to d8, as in the Canal line, gives White a slight initiative, but, as in our game line, it's still a fight.

7...♗c5 At this point, you can make a case for it being called the Archangelsk or Moller Defence.

Thus far, the moves are easy for White to pick.

8.c3 d6 9.d4 ♗b6 It is not advisable for Black to capture on d4 because 9...exd4 10.cxd4 ♗b6 11.♘c3 ♘a5 12.♗c2 h6 13.♘d5! forces the king to move after the bishop or knight takes since, if Black doesn't take, White will capture on b6 and get a lovely, ideal position to attack the king after it castles.

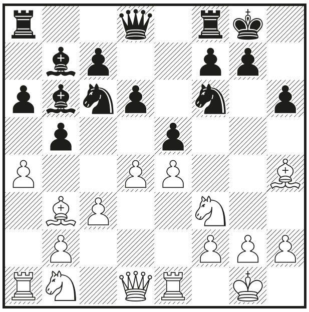
10.♗g5



Reminding Black of the awkward absence of the ♗e7. Now, Black has to choose how to deal with it. Just how much do you chase that bishop with h6 and g5 at the expense of compromising your kingside? There's also the timing issue. Do you do it right away or wait to see how things develop? Well, maybe a little nudge first...

10...h6 11.♗h4 Penrose could have gone with 11.♗e3 0-0 *(11...exd4 12.cxd4 ♘a5)* with the plan of 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♗xb6 cxb6 14.♘bd2; however, that little suggestion on move 11 may have deterred him.

11...0-0 12.a4

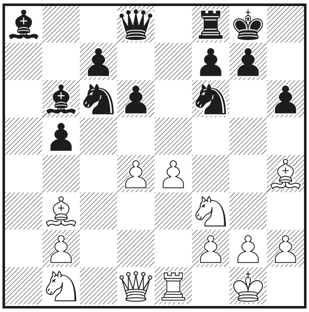


Hitting the black queenside pawns is as thematic as you can get with White in the Ruy. Black now has several playable choices which require a good deal of thought, which is why Black ought to have done his homework on how to handle these positions. Otherwise, a good deal of clock time will be used up.

12...exd4 Black could have gone astray here with 12...♕e7 13.d5 ♘a5 14.♗c2 c6 15.♘a3 g5 16.♗g3 cxd5 17.exd5 ♕d7 18.♕d2 bxa4 19.♘xg5 ♘b3 *(19...hxg5?? 20.♕xg5+* with mate to follow: *20...♔h8 21.♕xf6+ ♔g8 22.♕g5+ ♔h8 23.♕h6+ ♔g8 24.♕h7#)* 20.♗xb3 axb3 21.c4± as the ♘g5 can retire to f3 with honour.; There is also some unhappy excitement after 12...g5 13.♘xg5 hxg5 14.♗xg5 exd4 15.♗d5! dxc3 16.♘xc3 b4 17.♘e2 ♗xf2+ 18.♔h1! ♗xe1 19.♕xe1 ♔g7 20.♘g3 and the knight going to f5 or h5 will be decisive.

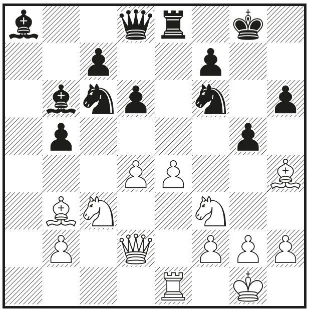
13.axb5 It gets quite complicated after 13.cxd4 g5 where White will have to play either the sane ♗g3 or the speculative ♘xg5. Considering that the white centre is well-protected and the bishop can retreat safely to g3 and eventually go to work on the extended black castled position, cxd4 was a playable option. Perhaps he wanted to simplify the queenside first before operations on the kingside.

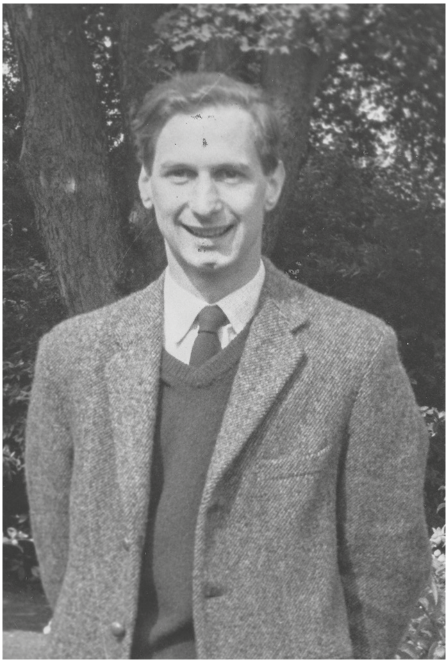
13...axb5 14.♖xa8 ♗xa8 15.cxd4



15...♖e8? This whole question of when Black should play 15...g5 and whether White should sac the knight now comes to its crisis moment. The whole opening idea of Black being able to post a bishop on b7 and not suffer the wrath of ♗g5 hinges on White's being able to play that sacrifice. In the final analysis, it all comes down to calculation of concrete lines. Could Black have played the pawn move here? 16.♗g3 *(The sac doesn't work here: 16.♘xg5 hxg5 17.♗xg5 ♘xd4 18.♗d5 ♘e6)* 16...♖e8 17.d5 ♘e5 18.♘xe5 dxe5 19.♕c2 *(19.♘c3 c6 20.h4 cxd5 21.♘xd5 ♘xd5 22.exd5 ♗d4 23.hxg5 hxg5= (23...♕xg5?? 24.♕xd4!) 24.♕g4 is judged by the engine as equal, but White's king is in a less draughty place.)* and now the black bishops get to exercise their potential as promised by their opening moves. 19...♕d7 20.♘c3 c6 21.♖d1 ♗d4 and a good many interesting things can still happen. Thus, Vukcevic missed an opportunity.

16.♘c3 g5 17.♕d2!?





The great Jonathan Penrose

I would love to see Penrose's notes on this possibility: 17.♗xg5!? hxg5 18.♘xg5 ♔f8 *(18...♘xd4 19.♘xf7)* 19.♘xb5 ♕d7 20.♗xf7 That's the very definition of wild. He decides to move the queen up to hit g5 first since the bishop can't be taken.

17...♘a5 Not 17...gxh4 18.♕xh6 ♕e7 19.♘xh4 ♕f8 20.♕g6+ ♕g7 21.♗xf7+ ♔f8 The bishop is secure as after 22.♗xe8 Black can resign.

However, Black forgets the theme of his opening set-up. Here we are on move 17, and, what seems ages ago, Black positioned his queenside pieces to hit the white centre. His knight didn't go to a5. His bishop went to c5 and b6 rather than e7 and his light-squared bishop didn't stay on the c8-h3 diagonal for a ♗d7 or ♗g4 move. All those placement decisions in the opening had a purpose. Here, a very strong player doesn't use the promise of the opening formation he chose. He could have neutralised the threat and equalised the position with 17...♘xd4 18.♘xd4 ♗xd4 19.♕xd4 gxh4 20.e5 dxe5 21.♕xh4 ♕d2 22.♖d1 ♕g5 23.♕xg5+ hxg5 24.♘xb5=.

18.♗c2 b4? There's a certain irony to the pawn thrust. Black abandoned the counter in the centre to go "old Lopez" by playing ♘a5 and then doesn't follow up that knight move with 18...♘c4! 19.♕c1 gxh4 20.♕xh6 h3 *(20...b4 21.♘g5 ♘e5 22.dxe5 ♗xf2+ 23.♔f1 ♖xe5 24.♖e2 ♗d4 25.♗b3 ♖xg5 26.♕xg5+ ♔f8 27.♘d5 ♗xd5 28.♕h6+ ♔g8 29.exd5+-)* 21.♕g5+ ♔h8 22.e5 dxe5 23.♘xe5 ♘xe5 24.♖xe5 *(24.dxe5 ♗xf2+!-+)* 24...♖xe5 25.dxe5 ♕e7! and White seems to have nothing more than a draw, albeit an exciting one!

19.♘xg5 bxc3 Can't take the knight: 19... hxg5 20.♕xg5+.

20.♕f4 White even has time for 20.bxc3.

20...♗xd4 21.♘h7! An interesting way to take advantage of a pin. That nasty white Ruy bishop lurks back on c2.

21...♗e5 Mate counterthreats by Black still can't shake White's advantage: 21...♖e6 22.bxc3 *(22.e5 ♗xe5 23.♕f5 ♕e8 24.♗xf6 ♗xf6 25.♘xf6+ ♔f8 26.♘h7+ ♔g7 27.♕g4+ ♔h8 28.♕d4+ ♔g8 29.♘f6+ ♔f8 30.♖xe6 ♕xe6 31.♕xc3 ♘c6 32.h3±)* 22...♗e5 23.♕f5 ♔g7 24.f4 ♕e8 25.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 26.♘xf6 ♖xf6 27.♕xa5 ♖xf4 28.♕xc7±.

22.♕xh6 ♖e6 23.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 24.♗xf6 ♗xf6 25.♖e3 So often, opposition rook lifts just take the breath out of the defender. Time to send that last card of congratulations.

25...♗e5 26.♖h3 ♕e7 27.♖h5 f5 28.♕g6+ ♕g7 29.♕e6+ ♕f7 30.♕c8+ ♕f8 Her majesty just can't save her exposed spouse.

31.♕xc7 ♗g7 32.♖xf5 ♕e8 33.♖g5 ♕f8 34.♖xa5 cxb2 35.♖a7

Black resigned. Once White plays ♕d7 with ♕h3, the white bishop will make the light squares fatal. If that isn't enough, the pawn on h2, which has been quietly sitting there for 35 moves, just has to threaten to advance to h6 to convince Black to pack it in.

1-0

I found this game fascinating because of the competing opening themes that last well into the middle game. This was no 'White to Play and Win' Ruy Lopez. White did follow a plan, one of several available, as did Black. However, the game was decided in White's favour because the great struggle over the g5 question and the question of Black not utilising the very counterattack he had set up resolved in White's favour.

That's why the average player essaying his favourite defence to the Ruy had better do more than memorise the first ten moves. You have to study what positions come out of the opening you have chosen. You have to know the plans for both sides that will emerge. You really have to do concrete calculating to decide the timing of your breaks. The road to chess improvement is not buying a new specialist opening book. Rather, it's doing the work of understanding why the moves are played in the opening and what you have to do in the middle game and even, at times, the endgame to implement the plan your opening strategy set up.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

This month's originals

David Shire, winner of 2nd Prize in our 2019-21 tourney, contributes another solver-friendly two-mover. When you see how mate will have to be achieved, you should find yourself progressing logically through a number of ways in which to try to set up mate, finding the one unique approach that works. Michael Lipton's two-mover is a more theoretical problem, and involves a named theme known to specialists, but here again a logical approach to solving should be enjoyable, regardless of terminology. In this case, once you have solved the diagram position, you will find that if the white rook at b3 is repositioned at b4 there is a changed solution. Michael's three-mover is another logical solving exercise, showing how much play can be extracted from just five pieces. And then finally a helpmate - two collaborative BWBWBW sequences of moves to reach mate from Christer's diagram position.

A characteristic David Shire problem

In order to take you through the first two-mover I can do no better than to reproduce David's own commentary on it, adding a few parentheses of my own. "In order to control the vital g6/d7 squares to threaten 2.♘g6/♘d7 White can try (a) critical move (b) ambush or (c) direct guard. 1.♗e4? (2.♘g6) 1…♖xh4+!. 1.♖d4? *[the other 'critical move', getting the white rook on to the correct side of d6, and thus threatening 2.♘d7]* 1…♖xe3 2.♕xe3 but 1…♖a7! *[because the mate set for this, 2.♕c3, no longer works]*. 1.♕f2? *[the first 'ambush' attempt, as 2.♘g6 would now mate by virtue of the queen's line of guard opened to f5]* 1…♗d6 2.2.♘d7 but 1…♖f3!. 1.♕b4? (2.♘d7) 1…♘f5 2.♘g6; 1…♖a7 2.♕c3, but 1…♖xe3! *[as 2.♕xe3 is no longer available]*. 1.e4? *[directly guarding f5 and so threatening 2.♘g6]* 1…♗d6! 1.♗e7! *[at last, the key! - guarding d6, this move threatens 2.♘d7]* - 1…♘f5 2.♘g6, 1…♖a7 2.♕c3, 1…♖xe3 2.♕xe3."

Pins and unpins

In Michael's two-mover, the black queen is pinned in the diagram position, but in problems it often turns out that, paradoxically, pinned black pieces have to be released from their pins in order to achieve mate. Here, there is a foretaste of this in the set play: if it were Black to play, then 1…d5? would be met by 2.♕f5 - the pin is released with impunity because …d5 has interfered with the line of defence c5-f5. This feature is termed a 'Gamage unpin', and we'll see it recurring in the solution. At first it appears that White can force 2.♕f5# by re-pinning the black queen, 1.♖c3, but this fails against 1…bxa5, which now leaves b7 unguarded. Instead White must play 1.♕c3!. This threatens 2.♕h8, and the interesting point is that now 1…d5, opening the line c5-f8 so as to enable the black queen to interpose on that square when it has been unpinned ('anti-Gamage'!), also closes the line c5-f5, permitting a changed 'Gamage' response - no longer the set 2.♕f5 but instead 2.♕h3. Note also that after 1…♕c6, which provides 'anti-Gamage' defences 2.Qh3 ♕d7 and 2.♕h8 ♕e8, White must play 2.♕xc6#.

In the twin position (with the white rook at b4 instead of b3), there is one nicely changed Gamage variation - 1.♕c4! (2.♕e6) d5 2.♕g4.

Corralling the pesky black knight

In Michael's three-mover (a 'tanagra', i.e., a problem with only five pieces), White clearly must aim to get the rook that starts on b1 to the 8th rank in such a way as to give

(See page 437)

mate on the third move. It turns out that the black knight and king put up a surprisingly stout defence. If White plays 1.♔a1 or ♔c1, then, although 1…♘a7 and 1…♘d6 both fail against 2.♖b8+, Black successfully defends with 1…♔f8!, and after 2.♖xb5 ♔e8!. So instead we try 1.♖c1. This works against 1…♘c3 (2.♖xc3), 1…♘c7 (2.♖1xc7) and 1…♘a7 (2.♖xa7) but not against 1…♘d6!. The only successful move is 1.♖a1!. Now we have 1…♘a3 2.♖xa3, 1…♘a7 2.♖1xa7 and 1…Nc7 2.Rxc7. Michael notes "across set play, two tries and post-key play, there are three continuations for 1…♘a7 and two each for 1…♘a3, 1…♘c3, 1…♘c7 and 1…♘d6". He also points out that this matrix, like that for his two-mover above, has further potential; you might like to examine why if the rook started from d2 instead of b1 the only route to mate in three would be 1.♖b7!.

An appealing feature of help-play…

…is that sometimes a white piece that guards a potential flight square of the black king has to sacrifice itself on that square because the mate requires that the square be occupied by a black pawn rather than guarded by a white piece. You will see this motif in both solutions of Christer's helpmate, nicely balanced because each of the white minor pieces is sacrificed once and gives mate once (the 'Zilahi theme'). Remember that in helpmate solutions Black plays first - 1.♔d4 ♘a5 2.♔c3 ♘c4 3.bxc4 ♗e5 and 1.♔e3 ♗f4+ 2.gxf4 ♘d6 3.♖e4 ♘f5. In each solution, the capturing black pawn masks a rook that would otherwise be able to defend.

SOLUTIONS TO ENDGAMES

(See page 440)

Hergert & Minski

1. ♗c6+ (1 point) **♖xc6 2.d5** (+1 point = 2) **♗xd5 3.♖a1+ ♔b5 4.♘d4+** (+1=3) **♔c5 5.♖b1** (+1=4) **a6 6.♖b5+ axb5 7.♘b3+** (+1=5) cxb3 8.d4 mate.

Nadareishvili

1. ♖d4 (1 point) **♘f5 2.♗f4** (+1 point = 2) **♘xd4 3.♗xd2** (+1=3) **♘b3 4.♗b4** (+1=4) **axb4 5.axb4** (+1=5) draws, e.g. 5…♘d4 stalemate.

A few sidelines: 1.♖f6+? ♔c5 2.♖d6 ♘d5 wins; 1…d1♕ 2.♖xd1 ♘xd1 3.♗e1 ♘b2+ 4.♔b3 ♘d3 5.♗xa5+ ♔xa5 6.♔c2; 1…♔c5 2.♖d3 ♔c4 3.♖xd2 ♗xd2 4.♗f4; 2.♖d5? ♘xg3 3.♔b3 ♘f1.

Nunn

1.c4 (1 point) **d3 2.c5** (+1 point = 2) **dxc5 3.d6 c4 4.d7** (+1=3) **c3 5.dxc3** (+1=4) **d2 6.d8♖** (+1=5) wins.

Keres

1.♘c2+ (1 point) **♔a2 2.♘b4+** (+1 point = 2) **♔a1 3.♕a2+** (+1=3) **bxa2 4.♘c6** (+1=4) **h3 5.♘d4 h2 6.♘b3** (+1=5) mate.

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